# THE SAVIOR AS ST. MATTHEW SAW HIM

HAGGENEY

II

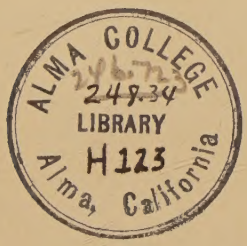
# THE SAVIOR
## AS SAINT MATTHEW SAW HIM

MEDITATIONS ON THE FIRST GOSPEL FOR THE USE OF PRIESTS AND RELIGIOUS

BY THE
REV. FRANCIS J. HAGGENEY, S.J.

*VOLUME II*

*The Message of the Kingdom of God*

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# THE MESSAGE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The subject matter of this second volume of meditations on the gospel of St. Matthew comprises a little more than five chapters (4,17–9,35). The Evangelist describes the Messias on the scene of His principal activity, the "Galilee of the Gentiles," and begins to develop the thesis which he intends to prove in his work, namely, that Jesus of Nazareth, though repudiated by the Jews, is the promised Messias and brings salvation to the whole world. As we saw before (Vol. I, page 42*), it has two parts: "The Message Addressed to Israel" and "The Organization of the Church." In the former he groups his matter under four distinct heads, the first of which we consider in the present volume. We may inscribe it as "The Message of the Kingdom of God." It has two subdivisions, how Jesus preached the Kingdom of God, and how He confirmed His words by miracles.

In the first subdivision we hear how Christ first appeared before His people as the promised Savior, made the necessary preparation for the promulgation of the laws of the new Kingdom of God, then published these laws in the Sermon on the Mount, and what results He achieved by this great promulgation.

It may not be amiss here to repeat a few of the suggestions concerning the use of this work for mental prayer. It is not intended that all the subject matter offered in one of the following meditations be gone through in one period

of mental prayer. As the words of the Evangelist are constantly followed in the order of his gospel, the reader may break off at any point, continue the next time where he stopped before, and, if not enough matter is left in a meditation, he can add more from the next. The words of the sacred text given at the beginning of every meditation, and the short synopsis which follows them, may serve as the first prelude, the petition suggested next forms the third prelude; the second prelude can easily be found by the reader himself. According to St. Ignatius, it is always "a composition of place, seeing the spot," or, as he remarks in "The First Exercise": "In a contemplation or meditation on visible matters, such as the contemplation of Christ our Lord, who is visible, the composition will be to see with the eyes of the imagination the corporeal place where the thing I wish to contemplate is found." Matter for the colloquy is suggested at the end of each meditation.

# Part I

## JESUS PREACHES THE KINGDOM OF GOD

### Meditation 1

### THE IMPORTANT HOUR

(Matt. 4,17)

"From that time Jesus began to preach and to say: Do penance, for the Kingdom of God is at hand."

The condition of the chosen people of God had reached the deepest point of spiritual, social, and political degradation. At this juncture Jesus, proclaimed by the Baptist as the Messias, appeared before Israel and announced the greatest message the world has ever heard: "The Kingdom of God is among you." This was the climax of Israel's history, coming immediately upon the deepest degradation. It was really "the important hour."

Let us ask for the grace that we "may know in this our day the things that are for our peace" (Luke 19,42); that we may understand the ways of God and learn how to take His hand when He stretches it out to us.

1. JESUS BEGINS TO PREACH. "From that time Jesus began to preach." What was the situation? Judea was groaning under the despotic rule of the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, Galilee was scandalized by the licentiousness of the Idumean Herod. The better people in both districts were horrified at the imprisonment of the Baptist. In their places of worship the simple folk found little of religious consolation, since the Rabbis wasted the time by propounding explanations of the Scriptures which were an outrage to common sense and true piety; in Jerusalem they had to witness the worldliness of the chief priests, who were materialists. Spiritually the nation was so perverted that only a radical conversion could help, politically and socially it was humbled into the dust by foreign oppressors. And now, in the midst of this darkness not a few faint rays of light, but the noon-day sun broke through the black clouds. John, whom the people revered as a prophet, had not only assured them that salvation was nigh, but had clearly pointed to a man as "the desired of all nations"; and that man now began to preach. It was indeed the climax of Israel's history coming immediately upon the deepest degradation; it was "the great hour," when "Jesus began to preach."

But who was He? He did not betray the dignity which the Baptist claimed for Him. How could He lead Israel on its glorious career? It was not long before the leaders of the nation voiced their objections against Him. "Search the scriptures, and see that out of Galilee a prophet riseth not" (John 5,22); and:

"How came this man by this wisdom and miracles? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary, and his brethren James, and Joseph, and Simon, and Jude: and his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence therefore hath he all these things?" And the Evangelist adds: "They were scandalized in his regard" (Matt. 13,54–57).

His sermons also were not what they expected. When He spoke of the arrival of the Kingdom of God and showed that the time foretold by Daniel for the coming of the Messias was at hand, He could not but please the people. But when, during the first months of His public career, He continued to enlarge on the theme of the Baptist, conversion and penance, He displeased many. Moreover, His addresses were so plain-spoken and devoid of the subtlety common to Rabbis: how could He be the person that was to lead Israel on its career of world-conquest?

*Applications.* 1) How frequently is the spectacle we see here enacted in Galilee repeated on a smaller scale in the life of individuals, societies and nations! For them, too, God's hour, fraught with consequences reaching out into eternity, often lacks the pomp and splendor with which man likes to surround acts and functions of importance. Priests and religious have a good chance to observe this in the case of the death of their brother-priests or fellow-religious. How few die when they and their surroundings expect them to die. Nay, how few are not surprised when told to prepare for their last hour. Any other time, any other disease would not surprise them. They have all

their lives imagined that when death approached, everything was going to be surrounded with a certain solemnity; but instead of that it is all so ordinary and common. And yet, it is God's hour, and they could not desire a better time and better circumstances for passing into eternity than this hour and these plain circumstances. Again, the divine inspirations calling to a higher life or greater virtue frequently are as plain as Christ's first sermons in Galilee. And, finally, how many of the greatest works of the Church begin with the same modesty and simplicity as the work of Christ in the "land of Zabulon and Nephthali." We must render ourselves familiar with this truth and act accordingly.

2) Christ's own work to this very day retains the modesty and plainness of His appearance in Galilee. The greatest dignity He can confer on man in this life is that which the Sacrament of Holy Orders produces; next to it is the dignity of a religious. But how simple and plain are the essential rites of the sixth Sacrament, and how few the words which really constitute one a religious: "I vow poverty, chastity and obedience," or, "I vow obedience according to the rule." And the supernatural dignity to which these rites and words elevate, remains forever concealed. The Man Christ always saw His elevation to the dignity of the hypostatic union with the Second Divine Person; but it made Him the humblest, holiest, most generous servant of God. In the same manner we must never forget, but constantly foster the consciousness of our true greatness, not for the purpose of self-aggrandizement, but as a constant motive for gratitude towards God and a perpetual impulse to spend our life in His service and to live up to the dignity of our state.

II. "HE BEGAN TO PREACH AND TO SAY: DO PENANCE." The Savior began His public career in Galilee by taking up the theme on which St. John the Baptist had enlarged with such emphasis and even vehemence. But though the subject was the same, the manner of handling it in one respect was very different. We certainly do not intend to blame the Baptist, as though he had been guilty of over-great severity. God inspired him to speak as he did. The Old Testament was the testament of fear and he, as belonging to it, had to preach in accordance with its spirit. Moreover, many of the Jews, above all the conceited Pharisees and the light-minded Sadducees, needed severity to rouse them to a realization of their sad spiritual condition.

But Jesus belonged to the New Testament, the testament of love, and He came to reconcile mankind to God, to bring exceeding kindness and mercy, and to engender in men the spirit of filial love of God. Therefore, He struck a tone of kindness from the very beginning. It was also more in accordance with His own disposition as man. St. Paul says very aptly that "the goodness [benevolence] and kindness of God our Savior appeared" (Tit. 3,4).

Jesus certainly preached on the subject of repentance and conversion in much the same way as we now hear it brought home to us in our retreats. The Jews were familiar with the history of the sin of the angels and of our first parents; they knew of hell and purgatory; they were even better acquainted than many of us are with the examples of God's justice in the Old Testa-

ment. Therefore, Christ did not demand anything unknown to them when He preached repentance; all the less so, since this had been the burden of the Baptist's sermons, to which so many of His audience had listened.

On the other hand, He had to begin by admonishing them to penance. For He came as Redeemer to cleanse their souls from sin and to adorn them with supernatural graces. But this was impossible without repentance. And finally, since He had to free His people from the wrong notion that the Messias was to bring them world-dominion and earthly prosperity, He of necessity first had to make them realize the sad spiritual condition in which He found them.

Therefore, in His own inimitable way, serious and impressive yet winning and gentle, He spoke about sin and its consequences, the wrath of God and the punishment awaiting the sinner. He certainly recalled to the mind of His hearers the fall of our first parents in Paradise, and how God then promised a Redeemer to free the world from sin. At the same time, He held out the hope of obtaining forgiveness and spoke of the reward awaiting the penitent sinner, namely, membership in the Kingdom of God here on earth and in Heaven.

*Applications.* 1) Meditations on sin and its consequences are at times made with some repugnance. If we would consider them as coming from the mouth of the Savior, they would be easier and more fruitful. It is a masterpiece of Christian pedagogy and psychology that St.

Ignatius in all his meditations on these subjects leads us to Christ.

Will it also not be very fruitful and helpful, when preparing for confession, to address ourselves to Jesus?

2) Repentance and penance are the basis of our spiritual life. For all spiritual life must be grounded on humility. Even the greatest saints have been life-long penitents. When reading the life of St. Teresa of Avila, one cannot fail to notice what a wonderful penitential soul she was, though she seems never to have committed a mortal sin and was constantly favored with the highest spiritual graces. Our daily faults and negligences, our want of generosity in God's service, and our unmortified passions on one side, and God's liberality, kindness, mercy, and patience on the other, are sufficient motives for repentance. It will, therefore, never be advisable altogether to leave what ascetics call the "purgative way." Only a heart which is not merely humble, but also contrite, is ready to receive God's graces.

III. "THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS AT HAND." The second object Christ had in preaching was to dispose people "to believe the gospel" (Mark 1,15). He certainly did not confine Himself to the mere assertion that the Kingdom of God was at hand, but must have explained to His audiences that the time foretold by Daniel and the other prophets had arrived, that the Messias was to come from obscurity and appear in lowliness without great pomp and noise.

"The Kingdom of God" was for the Israelitic mind the sum-total of everything a human heart can wish. The prophets had described its blessings in the boldest images. Whatever the history of God's chosen people witnessed of grandeur and magnificence, was but a fore-shadowing of the coming glory. Now Jesus said that He was bringing the reality.

What did He bring? Not an earthly paradise, as the Jews expected, but a dignity which connects man with Heaven and elevates him far above his natural position among the creatures of God. "As many as received him, he gave the power to be made sons of God, to them that believe in his name" (John 1,12). It is true that, as all who believe in Him must become members of a new society, His Church, He really invited the Galileans to form a new visible kingdom, which in more than one point resembled the theocracy established at Mount Sinai. But that new society, its authority, all its rights, powers and privileges were to serve a strictly supernatural and, therefore, invisible purpose, the union of souls with God by means of sanctifying grace and its accompanying gifts. This alone, and not the splendor of an earthly kingdom, was the proper end of Christ; it alone could move the Son of God to come down from Heaven and work on earth as the Son of Man.

*Applications.* 1) We priests and religious are called to take up Christ's work in souls. But we must do so in the spirit of Christ and according to Christ's conception. Therefore, the first soul we have to cultivate is our own.

We dare not be mere sign-posts pointing out to others the direction in which they are to go, but never taking it ourselves.

Moreover, unless we are seriously intent upon our own spiritual progress, we cannot hope to have much success in the work for souls. St. Paul gives a cogent reason for this when he says that by his sufferings he "fills up those things which are wanting of the sufferings of Christ" (Col. 1,24). Nothing, indeed, is wanting to the sufficiency of Christ's merits or, in other words, as far as Christ is concerned; but much is wanting for the efficaciousness of Christ's merits, or as far as men come in question. Many people are not disposed to receive the graces of the Savior, and what is lacking in their disposition must be supplied by us through prayer, mortifications, and good works of every kind. Nay, it would seem that not only the prayers and good works of the apostle, but his virtues, his habitual disposition of mind and heart, in other words, his personal holiness, count before God not only for himself, but also for others.

2) In our work for the salvation of others we must follow a standard and a norm which give each feature of this work its proper valuation. The care for the Kingdom of God in the souls of men must be our first and foremost object, not externals. Splendid buildings, flourishing societies, social work, success in teaching the secular branches, care for the physical welfare of patients, successful administration of finances, such and similar objects should be for us neither the principal aim nor the principal means. For by all these we can neither erect nor directly promote the Kingdom of God in souls. Otherwise, the best business managers, the most efficient teach-

ers of languages and sciences, the best scout-masters, the most skilful nurses would bring most souls to Heaven. Heaven is obtained only by strictly supernatural work, and the sacerdotal and religious states, as strictly supernatural, must employ first of all and principally supernatural means. It is not necessary that the teacher, the Sister in the hospital, the social worker, etc., preach all the time; but they must keep before their mind the supernatural salvation of the souls entrusted to them, and by prayers, sacrifices, virtuous example, patience, kindness try to win people for God. Above all is it necessary that the arrangements for the external and temporal should never interfere with the spiritual interests of souls.

COLLOQUY. Acts of gratitude to Christ, Who for our sake accepted the humble and laborious life and always chose by preference what is hard to nature. Petition for the spirit of inwardness and the interior life, which prevents us from being carried away by externals, the glamour of earthly things and earthly advantages to the detriment of the interior life. "Let me put off the old man, O Lord, and put on the new, which my holy vocation requires." (Prayer of St. Peter Canisius.)

## Meditation 2

### THE FIRST CARE

(Matt. 4,18–22)

"Jesus walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea (for they were fishers). And he saith to them: Come ye after me, and I will make you to be fishers of men. And they immediately leaving their nets, followed Him. And going from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets: and he called them. And they forthwith left their nets and their father, and followed him."

When the first readers of St. Matthew's gospel recalled to mind the time during which Jesus was exercising His Messianic activity in Palestine, they could not separate from Him the disciples who accompanied Him. Therefore, the Evangelist at the very beginning of Christ's public life narrates how the four most prominent of them became His followers. It was for a very wise purpose that Christ chose the official witnesses of His words and actions from among the plain people and called fishermen to continue His work.

Jesus, surrounded by His first disciples, represents

the beginning of the Church with its hierarchical constitution. The training He gives His Apostles must forever remain the model for the education of those who continue their work.

Let us ask for the grace to follow Christ's call with the readiness and fidelity of His first disciples.

I. JESUS CHOOSES DISCIPLES. "Jesus walking by the sea of Galilee saw two brethren, Simon who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother . . . and saith to them: Come ye after me. . . . And going from thence he saw two other brethren, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother . . . and he called them."

A. While Christ came to save all men without exception, He at no time intended to do the work all by Himself. From the very beginning He inculcated the great principle which He follows throughout all ages until the end of the world, that men must be saved through their fellowmen. Therefore, although He personally invited the Jewish nation to enter the Kingdom of God, at the very outset He surrounded Himself with disciples as His immediate entourage. It was a great distinction for those chosen in preference to all others, to be His constant and familiar companions; but they did not receive this dignity for their own sake. They had no special merit on account of which they might claim to be preferred to the others; it was God's free gift.

*Applications.* 1) The vocation to the priesthood and the religious state, like the call to the apostolate, in every

case is a gift of God, which nobody has any right or title to claim. We all have to confess that we have been selected from among many who equalled and even surpassed us in intellectual and moral qualifications. We must, therefore, every day of our life thank God for this undeserved mercy and kindness, and prove our gratitude by zealous efforts in the work of sanctifying our own soul, great fidelity in the observance of the rules of our state of life, and unsparing labor in the tasks assigned to us. Would it not be very ungrateful and unfair if, from levity or from other motives which we could acknowledge only with a blush of shame, we were to violate the regulations laid down for members of our state or to show carelessness and negligence in the performance of the duties incumbent on us?

2) We must thoroughly familiarize ourselves with the rule Christ always follows in saving and directing souls, namely, that He does so through the instrumentality of other human beings. Even the Saints, privileged with the most extraordinary supernatural favors, such as visions, ecstasies, and the other graces of the unitive way, are commanded by Him to let themselves be guided by men who participate in the power of jurisdiction given to His Church. As the Israelites of Christ's time had to believe and do not only what Christ told them, but what the Apostles preached, whom He sent to them even whilst He was on earth, so we have to believe and do what our Superior and the director of our conscience tell us concerning matters in which by virtue of their office they are competent. Anxious and scrupulous souls ought to ponder over this truth and muster up courage to apply it

consistently. Tepid, worldly-minded, sensual, and proud persons ought to consider seriously what they would do if the advice or admonition of Christ's human representative were given by the Savior in person.

B. But the Evangelist seems to have a second purpose in selecting the four men the history of whose vocation he gives here. He picks out precisely the four best known to the Israelites, to whom he addresses his gospel, and later on describes the manner in which he himself was called, in order to justify his and their claim to the belief of his readers. He and his four fellow Apostles have not only been with Jesus of Nazareth, witnessed His miracles, and learned from Him all that God intended to reveal to the world through Him, but they have been put under a most sacred obligation to continue His work, so that, as St. Peter tells the Sanhedrin after the cure of the lame man, "they cannot but speak the things which they have seen and heard" (Acts 4,20).

St. Matthew naturally mentions Simon Peter in the first place. He is not an unknown person even among the Israelites. While known to Christianity as Peter, even the Jews, from what he does among them and from the manner he acts in presence of their authorities, know him to be the head of the Apostles. In the "Acts" he is the spokesman of the disciples on all occasions, before the ordinary people and before the Sanhedrin.

Another is James, the first martyr among the Apostles. The Jews know him too; for when Herod Agrippa,

in order to please them, stretched out his hand against the Church, James was his first victim. Also Andrew must be known to them, as we can conclude from the special mention the Evangelist makes of him, and from a certain prominence he enjoyed next to the three favorite Apostles, already in the days when Christ lived on earth. Finally, John the Evangelist, the brother of James, is a familiar figure, because in the Acts of the Apostles he appears as the constant companion of Peter, and at the time that the gospel is written, he is the pillar of the Church of Asia.

Christ chooses them, so that, after His Ascension, they may be the pillars of the Church. They are to be the official witnesses of all He says and does during His public life, "beginning from the baptism of John until the day wherein he was taken up from us," as St. Peter explains when he presides at the election of Matthias (Acts 1,22). They are to preach in His stead, sanctify and govern the Church, protect her at the price of their lives, and, in a word, be for her what the four pillars at the corners of a building are for the entire structure. Their whole life, all their powers and capabilities, all their love and enthusiasm, all their aims and aspirations, are to be devoted to His Church. And all this He wants them to learn from Himself.

*Applications.* 1) Christ's first care and chief attention from the very start belong to His Church, His beloved bride. Already before the promulgation of the organic laws which will govern the Kingdom of God, He intro-

duces her to the world in the first members of her hierarchy. Could He teach us more emphatically that, when He calls human beings to a participation in "the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4,12), His purpose is not to exalt those so distinguished, nor merely to benefit individual souls, but "to edify [i. e., build up, increase, and promote the interests of] His mystic body," the Church. In His school the future levite and the religious have to learn that great and enduring love with which they, like their Master, must devote themselves to the service of the Spouse of Christ, the Holy, Catholic, Apostolic, Roman Church. This love does not consist in making fine speeches about non-essentials, nor in securing for her a merely temporal and worldly influence, but in sacrificing oneself for her spiritual interests, in promoting the spirit of Christ among her members, in helping the missions, fostering the missionary spirit, and above all in what St. Ignatius calls "thinking with the Church," sharing her views, adopting her principles, also where there is no express dogmatic definition.

2) If we wish to be thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the Savior, we must beware of the spirit of Subjectivism, which during the last four hundred years tried again and again to invade the Church. It consists in the tendency to discard the principles and practices hallowed by long tradition and to follow the subjective impressions and opinions of the individual, coupled with a morbid hankering for novelties. It shows itself even among well-meaning Catholics by a craving for new devotions and practices, based on sentiment rather than on sound theological principles. The fact that the Holy See has of late years been

compelled to censure not only quite a number of theological works of this description, but practices and devotions, ought to make us careful.

II. JESUS CALLS FISHERMEN. "Jesus saw two brethren, casting a net into the sea (for they were fishers). And he says to them: Come after me, and I will make you to be fishers of men. . . . And going from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets: and he called them."

The manner in which St. Matthew describes the vocation of these four Apostles is characteristic of him, not only in its brevity, but also in the points which he stresses, namely, that the men called were fishermen, that they were just then working at their trade, and that they immediately left everything and followed Christ. For the Jews, above all those of Judea, with their self-conceit and their prejudice against the Galileans, and "the accursed multitude that knoweth not the law" (John 7,49), Christ's selection was positively offensive. Even we, when looking at the choice from a merely natural point of view, might wonder why men were chosen who, as fishermen, lacked even the elements of a higher education and, therefore, seemed ill-prepared for the office of teaching the mysteries of our religion and of administering the Sacraments intelligently.

And yet, Christ chose them purposely. He wanted to give them personally all the preparation necessary for

their high office. All they brought along for this purpose was the unspoiled sincerity and whole-hearted docility of the plain man of the people. Although slow to understand those of the Savior's doctrines which were opposed to the prejudices and false notions of their nation, and although not free from human weaknesses, they offered themselves to Him with complete devotion, showed themselves docile, and expected everything from Him and from Him alone. There was no danger that they would adulterate His message with inventions of their own mind or that they would accept His doctrines and precepts with silent reservations. This unreserved surrender of their whole being and this firm resolution of not listening to any master but Christ, were the only demands He made. They constituted all that was needed, the rest He could easily supply.

*Applications.* 1) While to-day Christ demands some preparation from most of those whom He calls to His special service, the principal requirement, from which no dispensation can be granted, is the simple and unreserved surrender of their entire person to Him and perfect docility even after the years of preparation are over. Let us, then, in our vocational work, not put too much stress on the natural talents we may possess or on the scientific training we may have received. They may count much with a human standardizing agency, but not with God. After all, our work is supernatural, even if we are engaged in occupations which we share with persons who are neither priests nor religious, nor even Catholics. In the supernatural realm we are of ourselves as little quali-

fied for effecting great results as the fishermen of Galilee. But efficiency will be granted us if we imitate the Apostles in their whole-hearted devotion to Christ, in their unreserved surrender to Him, and in their docility.

2) When Christ calls somebody to the apostolate, he may be as uneducated as the fishermen of Galilee, his dialect may be as rough and uncouth as the Aramaic spoken by Peter, Andrew, James, and John, yet he will be able to accomplish his God-given task as perfectly as Peter, who could establish his see in the city of the Caesars, and John, who in his writings battled so successfully with the subtle heresies of his day. By their example Christ encourages us not to lose heart when those in authority impose upon us tasks for which we believe ourselves incapable or which involve a great responsibility. We must make certain that Christ imposes the task upon us, and then all will be well; for He will do the principal part of the work if we are wholly devoted to Him and seek nothing else but the fulfilment of His will.

III. JESUS SEEKS FISHERS OF MEN. "And he saith to them: Come ye after me, and I will make you to be fishers of men." Considered in itself, the vocation of an apostle is sublime. However, its work, though great, is neither poetical nor easy. Not without reason did Christ tell Simon Peter and his brother Andrew: "I will make you to be fishers of men." Whilst the angler may fish for his amusement, the fisherman, using nets, has hard work, both by night and by day. Hence, in promising to make them fishers of men, Christ implied that He called them to hard work. For they were to

engage in a combat not only for the salvation of their own souls, but for that of the souls of all men.

Christ, moreover, wanted workers who were frugal and not accustomed to luxuries; men whose daily lot was hard toil with a meagre sustenance; men trained to work not only in the day-time, but also at night; men inured to privations and sacrifices; men who could cheerfully bear disappointments. Perhaps no occupation has more disappointments than that of a fisherman. So far the Apostles had borne all this for the support of their bodily lives and the maintenance of their families; now they were to undergo even greater toil and trouble in the care for immortal souls.

*Applications.* 1) Neither temporal advantages nor spiritual consolations are the purpose for which Christ has instituted the priesthood of the New Law. Indeed, He will from time to time grant heavenly consolations to His faithful priests, because without them nobody can make the sacrifices which the sacerdotal vocation entails. But His primary purpose in establishing the priesthood is the spread of His Kingdom, in other words, the salvation and sanctification of priest and people. The only reward the priest is to seek here on earth for all the sacrifices he makes, consists in the increase of Christ's Church in the number and holiness of her children. Only when this is his aim, will he be a disciple corresponding to the intentions of the Master.

2) Though we embrace the religious state for the purpose of acquiring Christian perfection, this perfection does

not mean the constant enjoyment of spiritual consolations and it must not exclude the advancement of Christ's Kingdom on earth. By our progress in solid virtues, precious graces must be secured for the Church and the world, and by working for the Kingdom of Christ, we must advance in holiness. If we love Christ more, and succeed in making Him loved more by men, we shall consider this all the reward we wish to receive in this mortal life.

IV. THE APOSTLES FOLLOW IMMEDIATELY. "They forthwith left their nets and their father and followed him." The evangelists expressly mention that the Apostles followed Christ's call immediately, leaving everything. Peter and Andrew gave up their business and their families; James and John left their parent and their nets. St. Jerome proposes the question how they were able so blindly to obey and seemingly to disregard all laws of prudence. But they cannot be said to have acted imprudently, when we consider the conditions and circumstances under which they were called. They had heard the Baptist, whom they knew to be an inspired messenger of God, declare Jesus to be the Messias; they had been with the Savior for some time and, in a way were His disciples; they had witnessed the miracle at the marriage-feast of Cana, which, according to St. John, had the effect that "they believed in him" (John 2,11). To all this Christ added very special graces.

Nevertheless, the momentous step they now took was by no means easy for the natural man. We know how all their importance in God's Kingdom and the glory they now enjoy in Heaven, depended on it; but at that

time they did not foresee all this; yet they followed God's grace. Immediate obedience in their case was absolutely necessary; for since Christ had only three years to live and work, He would have had to choose others if they had refused or delayed.

*Applications.* 1) "The grace of the Holy Ghost does not know tarrying and hesitatingly heavy attempts," says the author of the Imitation of Christ. We certainly should not take every impulse, even though it be pious, for a call of God, but examine it carefully, and if it concerns things of greater moment, ask the advice of competent persons. But when we have obtained the certainty that the inspiration comes from God, we must not delay. The dignity of Him Who calls and our own well-understood interests demand this. God never calls too soon or at an inopportune time. He may foresee obstacles which later on will render it impossible for us to follow; He may withdraw His grace in punishment for our want of generosity and obedience; He may also know that immediate obedience is necessary because only so shall we be in the proper condition to endure the temptations and trials at hand.

2) The ready obedience of the Apostles shows us also the power of the grace of vocation. It really gives man superhuman strength. The Apostles followed promptly and cheerfully; and though the Gospel has to recount many mishaps of divers kinds, it never has to mention that the chosen Twelve regretted their step or were unhappy in their vocation, with the sole exception of the traitor, who through his own fault lost the grace of his calling. Our vocation must always remain the chief source

of our happiness and courage. Let us, therefore, be on our guard against everybody and everything that may threaten to destroy this happiness and take away this courage. Let us frequently consider in prayer before God the beauty, advantages, nobility of the state to which God has called us, and try to love our vocation the more, the longer we live in it.

COLLOQUY. Thank God for the grace of vocation; offer yourself readily to follow the Lord and to live only for Him, the interests of His Church, and the souls redeemed by His precious blood; ask for the true sacerdotal or religious spirit, which consists in absolute and total surrender to Christ as your Master and Teacher, so that you consider His interests your only work on earth. "Send forth thy light and thy truth; they have conducted me and brought me unto thy holy hill and into thy tabernacle. And I will go to the altar of God: to God who giveth joy to my youth" (Ps. 42,3.4).

## Meditation 3

### THE WORK OF THE MESSIAS

(Matt. 4,32–25)

"And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom: and healing all manner of sickness and every infirmity of the people. And his fame went throughout all Syria, and they presented to him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and such as were possessed of devils, and lunatics and those that had the palsy, and he cured them: and much people followed him from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judea, and from the Jordan."

After Christ had entered upon His office, there was no rest for Him any more. In every synagogue He announced the glad tidings that the Kingdom of God was come. At the same time He healed all manner of sickness and every infirmity, so that in the whole of Syria His name became a household-word as that of a man whom nobody left without having found comfort and help.

Let us entreat the grace of being filled with great zeal for souls.

1. JESUS PREACHES IN ALL THE SYNAGOGUES. "Jesus

went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom." Incessant activity for the purpose of winning the people for the Kingdom of God, this is the sum-total of Christ's public life. Although Galilee was a small province in a small country, it was densely populated and abounded in cities and hamlets. The historian Flavius Josephus speaks of 204 communes in the Galilee of those days. The Evangelist may understand by the term "all Galilee" a kind of moral universality and not intend to maintain that Jesus visited in person every single one of even the smallest places which had no synagogue. However, this much is certain: where there was any hope of establishing the Kingdom of God, no trouble was too much for the Savior, no village too small, no place too far out of the way, and above all, no human being too unimportant. His voice was heard throughout the entire country, and nobody could complain that he had no chance of becoming acquainted with the Messias and His message. If we study the accounts which the evangelists give of our Lord's movements and work during these three years, and bear in mind that He had to make all His journeys on foot and in winter-time on roads which were well nigh impracticable, we are surprised at the amount of work He did in that short period.

His principal activity was announcing the Kingdom of God, and everything else had to serve this purpose. Preaching and teaching were the great work of His vocation. Whilst we read in the gospels that His disciples baptized, it is never mentioned that He did so.

*Applications.* 1) Christ founded His Church on the preaching of the gospel. He sent His Apostles into the whole world to preach. Divine grace was to accompany their words.

From this it follows, not only that the Church is based on oral tradition, but that every one who is entrusted with the task of winning souls by preaching and teaching the doctrines of revelation, must take this duty very seriously and conscientiously. Realizing that he is but an instrument in the hands of Christ, he must be careful not to teach "in empty words of human wisdom," nor to dispense foolish anecdotes to unenlightened credulity, nor to dole out statements which are false interpretations of certain brief expressions in the smallest catechism and betray a sad ignorance of Catholic dogma. No lesson must be prepared as carefully as the lesson in religion, and therefore, it will be necessary to study it and always get a deeper insight into its truths.

2) Christ worked incessantly and tried to do good to the greatest possible number. One great fault of our age is the tendency to consider one's vocation merely an avocation and a means to make money. Even professional men do not care to work more than they have to. This is contrary to the spirit of Christ. The true apostle seizes every opportunity to win souls. Let us not be influenced by the spirit of the age, which shirks work wherever possible. We do not want to be better off than our Leader, who devoted Himself to hard work and long hours.

II. JESUS HEALS THE SICK. "Jesus went about all Galilee . . . healing all manner of sickness and every

infirmity. . . . And they presented to him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and such as were possessed of devils, and lunatics, and those that had the palsy, and he cured them." The divine seal of miracles was from the very beginning impressed upon the preaching of Christ; but the miracles He wrought were not pompous exhibitions to satisfy curiosity, but helps to relieve suffering. Thus, even exteriorly, He manifested Himself as the Savior. The aid which He gave to the sick bodies of numerous afflicted persons, won Him the hearts of men. It presented evidence that with all His promises, as well as with all His serious demands, He only intended to confer benefits. At the same time His cures, which excluded no kind of human ailment and were performed instantaneously and without the aid of any remedial means, remained true miracles, proving that He who appeared in the frail form of humanity, had divine omnipotence at His disposal. Never before, not even in the most glorious periods of Israel's history, had anything like this been witnessed. And thus He manifested Himself not only as the Physician, who attracted the sick, but as the great Prophet, who drew large crowds from the whole of Syria; nor was it mere curiosity which moved them, but the desire to see and hear a divine messenger.

What a wonderful picture do the few words of the Gospel suggest. We behold Jesus in the midst of human misery, imposing His hands on all kinds of sufferers, addressing kind words to them, and curing them from their ailments. The patients look up to Him with

pleading eyes, whilst the relatives or friends who brought them, beg Him to have mercy. Again, we see the victims of diabolical hatred and cruelty tortured by the evil spirits, even in Christ's very presence. And Jesus goes from patient to patient and works the cures in His own inimitable, yet simple and unassuming way. We notice the joy of all, as the erstwhile sufferers rise with health restored and praise God; the erstwhile energumens kneel down before Him with deep gratitude and thank Him for the inestimable benefit He has bestowed upon them. Not one of the sufferers has to return home disappointed, but every one retraces his steps in the blissful possession of a new life.

Those who witnessed these things could never forget them. They saw the Lord at His Messianic work; for He came to all the synagogues and preached in His plain yet overpowering manner. Wherever He was seen, the sick and those healed by Him surrounded Him. Endless were the masses of people coming from every side, and everywhere He announced: "The Kingdom of God is come."

*Applications.* 1) Is not the Savior the same to-day as He was then? How much consolation goes out from every tabernacle, how much new life is infused by Him into the bodies of countless sufferers in famous places of pilgrimage like Lourdes, or by the use of the sacramentals of the Church and the invocation of the Saints. This is the Master whom we serve. Does He not deserve all our love and confidence?

2) Mere words hardly ever win the hearts of men. This is one reason why Christ "went about doing good" (Acts 10,38) and why we must do the same. Moreover, our words, too, need the seal of divine approval. Though not endowed with the gift of miracles as credentials for our mission in this world, we are furnished with another means of identification, which for all practical intents and purposes is equally good and in every day life, as a miracle of the moral order, takes the place of the miracle of the physical order. Its name is Charity. Christ Himself made charity the distinctive mark by which the world is to know who are His disciples. Like the Savior, we must "go about doing good." Even Satan, after centuries of experimentation, has at last discovered that kindness towards the indigent and the sufferers is one of the best means to spread his empire. But there is a vast difference between the philanthropy of the world or the beneficence of certain secret societies on the one hand and genuine Christian charity on the other. Mere humanitarianism never can rise to the heroism of Christian charity. As they differ by a heaven's height in their motive, so the manifestations of the love and kindness inspired by the grace of the Savior far surpass the works of mere philanthropy in generosity, tactfulness, and delicacy.

III. JESUS ATTRACTS EVERYBODY. "And much people followed him from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judea, and from beyond the Jordan." Christ's appearance stirred up not only all Israel, but the country beyond the confines of Palestine. "His fame went throughout all Syria." Nay more;

whilst until this time Jerusalem had been the objective of all Jewish pilgrimages, now even the people of Judea went out into Galilee to seek Him in Capharnaum or in the open country, at the lake or in the desert. In this regard, therefore, the first success of the Savior could hardly have been greater. He certainly intended this success and worked for it, not indeed as an ultimate end, but as a means for attaining the great object of His coming. If, in spite of all this, the final success was not obtained and His preaching became a condemnatory testimony against Israel instead of its salvation, this was not His fault, but the fault of those who, despite all His efforts, misused their liberty and refused to accept the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

*Applications.* 1) We do not work to establish a reputation. God does not reward with success all serious work performed with a good intention. But if we are unsuccessful through our own fault, if through our neglect people are lost or do not lead that whole-souled and thorough Christian life which God expects of them, we burden ourselves with a frightful responsibility. It is precisely with reference to the use of their natural gifts and talents that our Lord explained to the Apostles how "the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light" (Luke 16,8). Ought we not to try at least to equal them? But we must make it easy for people to obtain our ministrations, and not be afraid to incur inconvenience in order to be of service to them.

2) It would be a very ill-conceived humility, behind which probably negligence or love of ease hides itself,

were we not faithful in using the gifts God has given us to win souls, and win them even with some glory to ourselves. Therefore, let us try to be successful, not for our own sake, but for the sake of God and of immortal souls. If success does not follow our labors, God will at least be glorified for all eternity by our good will. If we are successful, we should, like the Apostle, attribute it to divine grace, thank God for having deigned to make use of us, and refrain from indulging in idle fancies about the prestige we have won.

COLLOQUY. Oblation of our person and all our powers to the service of Christ; petition for the grace of being watchful over ourselves and those entrusted to our care and of always sowing the good seed and no tares. "Take, O Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my intellect and my will, all I have and possess. Thou hast given all to me; to Thee I return all. Give me Thy grace and Thy love; for this is sufficient."

## Meditation 4

### THE NEW LAW

(Matt. 5,1–3)

"And seeing the multitudes, He went up into a mountain, and when he was set down, his disciples came unto him. And opening his mouth he taught them saying: Blessed are the poor in spirit . . . Blessed are the meek . . ."

The brief sketch of the days in which the Savior went through Palestine teaching and healing, is followed by an account of His Sermon on the Mount, which is the promulgation of the organic laws of the Kingdom of God. We do not intend to take sides regarding the question whether the entire sermon was given on one and the same day and is one continuous address, or whether St. Matthew's account comprises several addresses delivered on different days. Good but not conclusive reasons may be advanced for either opinion. If it is objected that the Apostles could not have remembered such a long address, we can answer by pointing to the special assistance of the Holy Ghost, of whom Jesus promised that He would "bring all things to their mind, whatsoever Christ had said to

them" (John 14,26), and also to the fact that the gospels contain indications enough which go to show that Christ often repeated these same thoughts.

The Jewish readers to whom St. Matthew's gospel was first addressed, by this passage of it were naturally reminded of that other promulgation of divine laws which occurred on Mount Sinai. But while there are points of resemblance between these two important events, the features in which they differ would seem to be even more numerous and striking. We will consider both.

Let us ask for the grace that the Savior's words may produce in us a new life in accordance with the spirit expressed in the beatitudes.

I. THE NEW COVENANT. In Adam's sin mankind turned away from God, broke the relations of intimate friendship with Him which existed in Paradise, lost the dignity of divine adoption and forfeited the right to the beatific vision. God, indeed, immediately repaired the worst part of the harm by promising a Redeemer and granting all men for the sake of Christ's foreseen merits the means necessary for recovering grace and performing supernaturally good acts. But for the rest He "withdrew" from the human race, if we may use this phrase, by no longer granting to mankind as such the care and the favors which accompany the supernatural order, and by restricting the graces given to the individual for his eternal salvation, to a measure of sufficiency which appears rather small in comparison

with the abundance that characterizes the fully restored supernatural order. He limited His relations towards mankind taken as a whole to those of the Creator and His creatures. Whilst He occasionally spoke to one or the other individual man, as to Noe and Abraham, He "suffered all nations to walk in their own ways," (Acts 14,15) making Himself known to them only through the manifestations of nature, the history of the race, the voice of conscience, and the few private revelations vouchsafed chiefly to Adam and Noe and passed on by oral tradition. Thus, while all had a chance to obtain sanctifying grace and inwardly become His children, the condition of the race as such and of individual men in what we may call their outward relationship to Him, was merely that of creatures to their hidden Creator. It was a sad estrangement. Unhappily the bulk of mankind preferred to take a sorry advantage of the reserve and concealment of their Maker, "became vain in their thoughts, and their foolish heart was darkened" (Rom. 1,21). The result may be given in one word—"Paganism."

Paganism, however, is not only ignorance and neglect of God, but also slavery under the control of the devil. Satan lorded it over the unhappy race through the insatiable cravings of concupiscence, the horrors of idolatry, the institution of chattel-slavery and the iron rule of the pagan state. It made no difference whether the supreme authority was vested in an individual autocrat, or a proud oligarchy, or a tyrannical democracy—in every case the subjects or citizens were the slaves of

the civil power, the holder of which was supreme in all matters, religious, moral, and social as well as political. It is very significant that so many of the rulers demanded divine honors and that in the ancient languages the word for servant and slave is the same. Satan was "the prince of this world," and God seemed to let mankind plunge into an ever-deepening chaos, whilst He observed a silent reserve.

At last, after centuries of woe, He broke His silence. Through Moses He revealed Himself to the Israelites, freed them from the Egyptian bondage and, on Mount Sinai, made a pact with them, in virtue of which they became "His people." Politically, instead of being the slaves of Pharaoh, they were now "Yahweh's bondsmen," governed by new laws, which regulated their religious, moral, social, public, and private life. From time to time He spoke to them through prophets and divinely inspired writers, and frequently protected or liberated them from the miseries which they deserved for their infidelity to the covenant.

They were "Yahweh's bondsmen," first of all because He was their political ruler. Moreover, the religious worship instituted for them through the mediatorship of Moses did not confer interior grace, which is necessary for becoming a child of God, but only an external rectitude, or what the theologians call "legal holiness." Interior sanctity or sanctifying grace and actual graces they had to obtain by their own acts just like the Gentiles. Again, the special revelations which were granted them concerned only a comparatively few

truths about God and did not give them that intimate knowledge of the Father in Heaven which is the privilege of children. And finally, the numerous levitical regulations, to which they had to be subjected in order to keep the true faith, resembled the restrictions put upon slaves and produced a condition which was far from the liberty of the children of God. Nevertheless, the whole Mosaic institution was a great gain. Life in every respect was happier and easier for the Israelites than for the Gentiles, and their religious, moral, and social condition was far better.

But now, when the Savior gathered multitudes around Him at the mountain in Galilee, God gave up His reserve for the entire world and wanted to make a new covenant with the whole of mankind through the mediation of a Man who is more than a human being, and publicly raise men to the dignity of children of the Father in Heaven. The new pact was not to have any direct political consequences, like the Sinaitic covenant, though in time also the civil governments were to become Christian and to be guided by principles which are in accordance with the dignity of the children of God. This covenant, which will last until the end of time, is a pact concerning above all the spirit and spiritual things, in virtue of which the deepest secrets of the Godhead, the Trinity, the Incarnation, the nature of supernatural grace, man's ultimate destiny, became known to the human race, and men again entered upon terms of intimacy with God. The rites prescribed in the New Law became sources of interior holiness and supernaturally

efficacious in themselves, or what we call "Sacraments of the New Law." Graces and gifts from now on were offered to mankind with a truly divine liberality; miracles of very rare occurrence before, would now be granted frequently in every age. The fetters of those hundreds of levitical regulations were removed and the new regulations aimed at interior, supernatural sanctity instead of external legal holiness. And finally, while the Old Covenant terminated for every Israelite at the hour of death, and was to last for the nation only until superseded by the New Covenant, this new pact was to continue in force also after the individual left the earth, nay, mankind redeemed by Christ remains God's people for all eternity. In fact, Heaven is but the consummation of what is begun on earth.

This is the significance of the Sermon on the Mount. God binds Himself to let mankind as a whole and in particular every individual who is ready to join in the New Covenant, enjoy the full benefits He deigns to bestow upon His children on earth. He is willing to be their Father again, and Christ invites the whole world to become participants in this covenant.

*Applications.* 1) How great must be our gratitude towards God for having placed us among those who can enjoy the fullness of the blessings which originated with the Sermon on the Mount. Should we, whose ancestors were pagans, have been saved, had we been born before Christ or among the millions who to this day know nothing of Him? Our youth has been a happy one precisely because our parents and those with whom we came in con-

tact, were imbued with the principles proclaimed by the Savior on that eminence in Galilee. Our state and our position in the Church are the perfect realization of the same blessed truths. Gratitude must compel us to strive to live up to the deepest implications of this wonderful sermon. It must also urge us to imbue as many as possible with the truths taught by Christ. How comparatively few are they who try to follow the line of conduct laid down by the Savior; but how numerous are the persons and publications giving the lie to the "true doctrine" and bending every effort to keep mankind in the bonds of the "prince of the world." What shall we do in the face of this condition?

2) How much is hidden under the plain and modest appearance of the Savior on the mountain instructing the multitudes! We may well say that His dignity is in direct proportion to the modesty of His exterior, and the importance of His words is as vast as His address is simple and natural. This plainness, too, belongs to the qualities of the New Testament in distinction from the sense-impressions of the Old. Christ's inspirations are gentle, plain, modest; for this reason many fail to notice them. It takes an interior, recollected disposition to become aware of them.

II. THE NEW LAW. Christ's appearance on the Mountain of the Beatitudes has nothing of the overpowering majesty of Sinai and of the halo which forced the mediator of the Old Testament "to put a veil upon his face" (Ex. 34,33). Nevertheless, His law aims at a deeper and more perfect control of man and demands

much greater sacrifices than the Mosaic law. The latter only made external actions which violate the rights of God or men, punishable offences, and in the ninth and tenth commandment merely forbade certain kinds of covetousness without, however, fixing a penalty for the transgression. Christ's legislation, on the contrary, is designed to destroy the root of all sins, man's evil will, and, therefore, has many paragraphs concerning thoughts and desires. Moreover, while the Old Law aimed rather at preventing actual rebellion against God, the New Law wants to make God the real Master of the human heart. The short formula of the former would be: "God *above* everything"; that of the latter: "God *in* everything." While the former forbade whatever is *against* the divine will, the latter wants nothing to be done that is *outside* the divine will.

Another great difference between the two legislations lies in the fact that the New Law not only points out what is right and wrong in moral matters, but also gives man the power to observe it, whereas the Old Law only showed what is right and what is wrong, without granting the necessary help for doing the right and avoiding the wrong. It only made the struggle between good and evil in man more manifest than it was already through the law of conscience (cf. Rom. Chapters 3–6). The divine aid which was given to those who lived under the old dispensation in reality was what we may call a partial anticipation of the graces of the New Testament.

A third radical difference consists in the general

tenor of the moral precepts contained in what we may style the articles of the two covenants. On Sinai ten moral precepts were promulgated and eight of them began with the words: "Thou shalt not!"; on the mountain of Galilee eight laws are proclaimed, and every one of of them begins with the words: "Blessed are." The former are negative and forbid to do evil; the latter are positive and invite to do good.

*Applications.* 1) Let us keep the peculiar character of Christ's law constantly before our eyes, both in our own spiritual life and in the direction of others. Christ's aim is not mere external correctness nor mere freedom from sins and external faults, but interior righteousness and supernatural virtuousness. Our heart must belong to God. External correctness can well co-exist with internal disorder; for it is quite possible to observe outward regularity even in matters concerning our vows and other duties from pride or even lower motives. One can think oneself blameless and a faithful servant of God merely on account of some external practices scrupulously adhered to, and remain very self-willed, jealous, proud, addicted to personal comforts, sadly wanting in charity, impatient in trials, moody and dejected in adversity, ungenerous in real sacrifices.

2) Our aim must be: "God *in* everything." We must strive gradually to arrive at a state of soul in which we do nothing that is outside the divine pleasure. This is not the work of a few months; we shall often fall short of the great aim; but we ought not to become discouraged. Let us bravely and patiently rise after every fall. It is a

great virtue to remain humble and patient with ourselves and not to lose courage at the sight of our numerous failings. In the spiritual life we resemble students of mediocre mental gifts: as these succeed in the end by their constant plodding and dogged perseverance, so we shall accomplish creditable results by consistent and unintermittent work at perfecting ourselves. But these results will never appear great for us. God wants to keep us humble.

III. THE NEW SPIRIT. Satan, as the tyrant of the world, had succeeded not only in rendering the minds and hearts of men impervious to motives transcending earth, but in breeding in them a spirit of abject servility. Hence the Lawgiver on Sinai had not only to enforce His laws by sanctions of temporal prosperity and earthly losses, but to inspire them with fear of His majesty and power. This is the reason why the earth quaked, the air was rent by peals of thunder and the shrill sound of trumpets, the mountain "was terrible," a mass of "smoke and fire," and the voice of the invisible speaker rang out of a dark cloud in stern accents (Ex. 19,18 ff.). The spirit of the Old Law was one of wholesome severity on the part of God and of servile fear on the part of Israel.

The spirit of the New Law was to be one of paternal love on the part of God and of filial affection on the part of men. For this reason the mountain on which the new legislation was promulgated, lay in the clear sunlight, the Lawgiver was visible to all and looked up to with trusting eyes; He framed His words into a seri-

ous but kind invitation, mentioned earthly blessings and punishments not even with one syllable, but held out eight promises of supernatural favors and always referred to God as "your Father in Heaven."

He overturned all the philosophy of life in vogue until then, made demands which went much farther than those of Sinai, and penetrated to the deepest recesses of human nature. And yet, His audience experienced an elevation of heart and a freedom of spirit so far unknown to the world. For He urged them to walk the ways of God in a new liberty, not in the liberty of the flesh, but in the liberty of the spirit triumphing over the flesh. He taught them to love God as their Father and to obey Him in "the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry: Abba, Father" (Rom. 8,13).

*Applications.* 1) How much of the spirit of the "Sermon of the Mount" has become our own? Is God really our one and sole master? Are we free from that spirit of fear which sees in Him only a severe master and strict judge, or do we behold in Him a kind and loving Father? Do we really try to please Him or do we not rather endeavor to escape His punishments? Do we look upon our obligations as on so many restrictions and burdens or as on ways and means by which the Father in Heaven wants to make us contented on earth and happy in Heaven?

2) Our Savior here gives all who have to work for souls an important lesson concerning the motives which they ought to propose to those souls for avoiding sin and

practicing virtue. It is a mistake in education and in the direction of souls to draw the principal motives from the severity of God's judgments. In doing so it may easily happen that something which is only a venial sin, is spoken of as though it were a mortal offence. It is frequently hard to decide whether something which in the end may lead to sin or in some other way prove harmful to a young man or woman, must be avoided under pain of sin, or whether the omission of some good work or pious practice which we wish them to undertake, contains a real guilt. If such a person puts the ominous question: "Do I commit a sin by not taking your advice?" or worse still, if that first question is followed by one more ominous: "Will it be a mortal sin?" the adviser is facing a rather dangerous situation. If he answers in the negative, in nine cases out of ten the direction will not be followed, and great harm may result; if he replies in the affirmative, he may tell an untruth and without reason multiply sins. He has probably made a mistake in the manner in which he proposed his suggestion; he insisted only on the motive of fear. He ought to have appealed to the generosity of his client and stirred up love of God in that person's heart by proposing higher motives, raising his mind to Heaven and appealing to his sense of gratitude.

COLLOQUY. Acts of thanksgiving for having been "called by his holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 1,9), and for having received not "the spirit of bondage again in fear, but the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry:

Abba, Father" (Rom. 8,15). Acts of begging pardon for all faults committed against that spirit; petition for the grace of learning to conduct ourselves not as slaves, but as loving children.

## Meditation 5

### CONDITIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

### (Matt. 5,3–6)

"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek: for they shall possess the land. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice; for they shall have their fill."

### A. "Beatitudes"

We may call the eight beatitudes the basic principles of Christ's doctrine and the articles of the constitution of the Kingdom of God. Since membership in the Kingdom of God here on earth not only gives us the right to eternal happiness but also is the certain means for contentment in this life, the beatitudes may also be styled "Ways to Happiness." But they are diametrically opposed to the world's notions about the means for contentment. Therefore, one of our serious efforts must consist in the endeavor to gain a deep and lasting conviction of this truth, and strength to live up to it.

Let us entreat the grace of a profound and lifelong conviction that only by following out the lessons of the

beatitudes can we be contented in this world, and for courage and determination to live up to it.

Man can attain eternal happiness after death and peace and contentment in this life only by living up to the destination God has given him, in other words by being a faithful member of the Kingdom of God. This Kingdom of God consists in total submission to God not only as the Creator and Supreme Lord, but as the Loving Father, just as the kingdom of Satan or of the world consists in rebellion against God. Man's nature has been moulded precisely for this great end and for this reason he can reach neither eternal bliss nor real contentment in this life except by doing on earth freely and voluntarily what will be the essence of his everlasting joy in eternity, God's reign in his heart. The Kingdom of Christ here on earth has no other purpose than this loving submission. Consequently every one who is not resolved to be wholly dependent on the Father in Heaven and wholly devoted to the fulfilment of the divine will, is not fit to become a member of the Messianic Kingdom. As he is alien to its spirit, he is unfit to enjoy the rights and privileges it bestows. Its spirit is directly opposed to the spirit of that kingdom which Satan established on this earth when he seduced our first parents. Consequently, Christ when laying down the conditions for membership in His Kingdom, must assume a conscious opposition to many inclinations which original sin implanted in our fallen nature, declare hurtful much that the natural man, blinded and

weakened by sin, esteems highly, and contrariwise, pronounce desirable and even necessary much that Satan and the world condemn as harmful and foolish.

What, then, must have been the surprise of the Apostles and the people, when they heard Christ proclaim the beatitudes! Here was language new to earth. For all men so far had craved and striven for earthly possessions, worldly influence, human power; all had tried to escape privations, humiliations, persecutions, firmly convinced that only thus they would attain happiness. And now they were told that the road to happiness lay in the opposite direction.

*Application.* Perhaps one of the greatest impediments in the way of progress in spiritual life is the attempt to follow partly principles of this world or fallen nature and partly principles of Christ and grace. Whilst not accepting all the false notions and axioms which are antagonistic to the principles of the beatitudes, the soul clings to some and tries to harmonize them with Christ's teachings. But it attempts the impossible. The necessary result is that it never obtains that peace which it so much desires and which Christ promises in the beatitudes. It is, therefore, absolutely necessary that by dint of much reflection and serious effort it acquires what St. Ignatius would call "an interior conviction" about this. And that means three things. First of all it must be convinced that Christ's principles are the only correct ones, but diametrically opposed to the axioms of the world. Secondly, it must always remain deeply impressed with the truth that by discarding entirely and consistently the standards and

aspirations of the world and fallen nature and bravely following the principles of the Savior, it will not only reach Heaven, but most surely obtain peace and contentment even in this life. Thirdly, it must have courage and strength of character enough to act according to these convictions. These are three precious graces, which we ought to implore in frequent prayer. Holy Church entreats them when, on Pentecost day, she prays for "a right understanding of things in the Holy Ghost and the constant enjoyment of His consolations."

## B. Poverty of the Spirit

"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

In the first four beatitudes Christ explains the conditions for becoming a member of His Kingdom. The first is interpreted by the students of Scripture in various, but not entirely different, ways. We give two of them. Both deal with the riches of this earth in as far as they form an obstacle to the Kingdom of God, either by captivating the heart or by producing a spirit of independence opposed to submission to God. At the same time we must notice how Christ, at the very outset, takes issue with that woefully wrong notion which the Israelites entertained about the Messianic Kingdom and on account of which they, in the end, forfeited their claim to it.

Let us ask for the grace of becoming truly poor in spirit.

I. DETACHMENT FROM THE GOODS OF EARTH. Christ is surrounded by His disciples, who have left everything and now are poor with Him, and by a large multitude of people, who suffer from the want of earthly goods and all the evils which attend indigence. For since the prophet has foretold, according to Christ's own testimony, that "the poor will have the gospel preached to them" (Matt. 11,5), the poor and afflicted form the necessary audience when He proclaims the fundamental laws of His Kingdom. He looks at them with benevolent eyes and says in accents of kindness and conviction: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." His voice carries far into the mountain-plain. All hear it and wonder. For every Israelite, this poverty-stricken audience included, is waiting for the promised Kingdom of Heaven; all are firmly convinced that it will bring them an abundance of earthly riches, according to the false explanation of the prophecies which they hear Sabbath after Sabbath in their synagogues.

But in the first sentence He utters, the Savior deals a fatal blow to this baneful error. The very word He chooses for the somewhat ambiguous term of "poor," admits of but one explanation. For it signifies "beggar" and is used only to designate those who suffer from want of material possessions. The Kingdom of Heaven belongs to "the beggars."

However, they must be "beggars in spirit." The term "spirit" in the New Testament signifies either the Holy Ghost or the human spirit as enlightened and strength-

ened by the Holy Ghost. Hence, the Lord means those who are beggars by the grace of God. Who are they? We find the answer to this question in the parallel text of St. Luke's gospel, where to the words quoted by St. Matthew the third evangelist adds: "But woe to you that are rich; for you have your consolation" (Luke 6,24). Christ, therefore, excludes from His Kingdom those who seek and find their whole happiness in the delights and pleasures obtainable by wealth. Therefore, He does not refuse entrance to those who are possessed of large means, but only to those who attach their heart to them and consequently neglect the pursuit of heavenly things—a fault which not only the affluent can commit, but also those who live in abject poverty. "Beggars in spirit" are consequently, those who either bear poverty from motives inspired by the Holy Ghost, or at least keep their minds and hearts properly detached from the wealth of the earth. The desire for earthly riches and all that goes with them, as unbounded pleasures, social distinction and financial control together with political rule, this mad craving, which is the ruination of Israel, thus stands emphatically condemned by the very first paragraph of the constitution of the new Kingdom of Yahweh. Persons fired with such desires and ambitions can never become its members, neither on earth nor in the world to come. As the very first requisite for being permitted to enjoy the Messianic blessings, the Savior inculcates proper detachment from all that the world considers the only source of happiness.

For what is the reward of those who comply with this

first demand of the Messias? "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The direct object of this promise is membership in God's Kingdom on earth and a full share in its rights and privileges. The faithful use of them will also secure admission to God's Kingdom in the other world.

How true this promise of our Savior is, we see in the case of those Catholics who attach their hearts to wealth and make its pursuit the great object of their lives. Of what small avail is their religion to them! In prosperity they are consumed by restless desires and all the aches which go with great riches. They often become surfeited and find life not worth living. In sickness and adversity they have nothing to bear them up. Peace and contentment of mind they seek in vain; the consolations of religion are unknown to them. And on the other side how much peace and consolation is given by God to "the beggars in spirit!"

*Applications.* 1) Detachment from earthly possessions and from the pleasures of the world is doubly necessary for the priest. His very first step into the sanctuary is the holy rite in which he declares that "the Lord is the portion of his inheritance." He is the best educated among professional men and receives the smallest remuneration. It must be so; for if his heart is in the things of the world, he is a mere hireling. Holy Church forbids clerics to engage in lucrative business, hoarding and speculating. Let us also be careful to observe clerical modesty and plainness so that through graces and divine consolation the hope expressed in the reception of the tonsure becomes true: "Thou wilt restore my inheritance to me."

For religious the first beatitude means the exact observance of the vow and virtue of poverty. Practically this exactness amounts to being conscientious in asking for the necessary permissions in the use, acceptance, and disposal of articles, in being satisfied with plain objects and cheerfully bearing the effects of poverty.

2) But clerical and religious poverty are impossible, unless we free our hearts from attachment to material things. Otherwise we should be groveling on earth and not feel attracted by the supernatural. If we try to find consolation in petty earthly goods, we shall be all the more miserable; for nobody is more afraid of losses than he who has little and makes much of it.

II. BEGGARS BEFORE GOD. Some interpreters prefer this explanation: "Blessed are they who, enlightened by the Holy Ghost, feel themselves as beggars before God; for they alone are entitled to be received into the Kingdom of God." The Israelites believed that, as sons of Abraham, they had a claim to Heaven and to all the riches of the world as their undeniable right, which Yahweh could not refuse them even if they sinned grievously. This notion rendered them independent and self-sufficient even in their dealings with God. But the Kingdom of God or God's reign in man's heart demands above all that humble submissiveness which arises from the realization of our total dependence upon God. As creatures we need His constant preserving and cooperating influence, which He can take away without giving notice. He merely loans his blessings to us and

will demand an account of the use we make of them. Before Him we are beggars, wholly dependent on His liberality. The first step into the Kingdom of Heaven is the practical acknowledgment of this truth.

But even in this interpretation of the first beatitude, the explanation given before may not be entirely overlooked. For nothing gives man a greater sense of independence than wealth, and nothing is commonly considered more necessary for happiness than a heaped measure of earthly possessions. It is one of the curses of riches that they are so apt to make their owners forget God and claim the right to live and act as they please, whereas poverty renders one humble and forces one to look up to God for one's daily bread. It is, therefore, very necessary for the opulent to realize that their wealth is a gift of the Creator, who has the right and the power to deprive them of it whenever He pleases; that they are but the stewards of what they may call their own only in reference to other men, but not in the sight of the Divine Owner.

And what is the reward of this beatitude? "Blessed are the beggars before God." This humility gives a wonderful sense of peace and contentment. There is perhaps no unhappier person on this earth than the proud man. The least word that may be misconstrued and every want of attention rob him of his peace of mind. Every visitation of God hurts his pride. He is very poor; for the Kingdom of Heaven and its graces are not for him, since "God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble" (James 4,5). "Theirs is

the Kingdom of Heaven." The members of this Kingdom must be submissive and obedient to the authority established in it; but only the "beggars before God" are able to practice these virtues.

*Applications.* 1) It is profitable often to renew the sense of our total dependence on God, whose assistance both in the natural and the supernatural order we need more than a babe needs the care of its mother. The realization of this truth will make us humble even in the performance of the highest and most perfect acts of virtue, and will fill our heart with the greatest confidence in God. It will bring Him very near to us.

2) What a wonderful physician of souls is the Savior! He begins by attacking the root of all spiritual maladies—pride and self-will. If we submit to His treatment, we need not worry about our progress in virtue. All we have to do is to carry out His instructions as He gives them to us in His precepts, in the rules Holy Church has drawn up for our state, and in the course and development of our lives. We know that nothing happens by chance, that Providence has mapped out a career for us which, if we follow the directions of Christ, will surely lead us to the desired end.

COLLOQUY. Thank the Savior for the instruction He has given you. Beg His pardon for your lack of fidelity in carrying it out. Offer yourself wholly for His service. Beg for grace to serve Him in poverty of spirit with great love. "What have I in heaven? and beside thee what do I desire upon earth? Thou art the God of my heart" (Ps. 72,25.26).

## C. Humble and Holy Meekness

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall possess the land."

In the first beatitude Christ set Himself in opposition to the general notion current among men about what constitutes happiness and is necessary for contentment in this life, and corrected their error concerning the temporal goods of earth; in the next three He rectifies their opinions about the evils inflicted by men. In the second, which forms the subject of this meditation, He teaches that helplessness and patient submission in oppression and injustice, coupled with confidence in God, is a requirement for all who wish to become citizens of His Kingdom, and that only through this meekness and humility, inspired by love of God, can man become happy.

Let us ask for the grace of rendering ourselves worthy citizens of the Kingdom of God by meekness.

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall possess the land." Of the different Greek words which express meekness, the Evangelist chooses that which both in the Old and the New Testament signifies patient, trustful submission to God when one is helpless and powerless, above all, when for God's sake one submits humbly and confidently to persecution, oppression, offence and loss. The Savior here takes issue with the notion of the Israelites that they are justified in entertaining feelings

of vindictiveness against every Gentile who offends a member of the chosen people, and above all against the pagan oppressors who have subjugated their nation and who harass them constantly by deeds of wantonness and injustice. Now Christ declares to them and to the men of all future times that whosoever wishes to be a member of His Kingdom, must bear insults and injustice with patience, trust in God, and not harbor feelings of revenge or even of unwillingness.

But He goes a step farther. In human estimation only he is happy who has the power to force his will on others. But this power easily leads to pride, a false sense of self-sufficiency and independence, and thus renders one unfit for that realm in which the divine will is the only law and humble submission is the predominant disposition of mind. Consequently, by demanding "meekness," Jesus condemns also the desire for that kind of power and personal influence in this world which only serves one's own private interests. He implies that even the great ones of this earth must share the virtuous meekness of the little ones, if they want to enter His kingdom. They are to realize how little and unreliable influence in this world is, how easily lost, how it is utterly unavailable before God and must be used only according to His intentions. Those who have no power must learn to rely on God's providence and protection, accept their lot in humility, and remain fully conscious that their Supreme Lord has so ordained it.

And what is the reward of the meek? "They shall possess the land." These words are a repetition of what

the Holy Ghost had already said through the Psalmist: "The meek shall possess the land" (Ps. 36,11). The same idea is expressed in other parts of the Old Testament. But what is the meaning of these words? In the Old Testament the quiet possession of the Land of Promise was a proof that the happy possessors enjoyed Yahweh's favor and were acknowledged by Him as true citizens of the theocracy. Now the old theocracy was a type and preparation for the Messianic Kingdom. Therefore, "to inherit and possess the land by inheritance," means to belong to the Messianic Kingdom and have a full share in the blessings which are the natural results of God's dominion. This promise is at once a declaration of principles and a pledge of graces. In the former sense Christ inculcates several important truths, such as that His Kingdom is spiritual, that the predictions made by the prophets of victory and world-rule must not be understood in the crass materialistic sense which the Jews attributed to them, and that He and His adherents will conquer the world by patience and meekness. As a pledge of blessings, it holds out the greatest favors. "The meek" are "blessed," happy on earth in the possession of God's love and of all the rights and privileges which belong to His Kingdom. Not the least among them is the divine protection which will guard them more securely against real harm than all the power and influence of this world could effect. This help of the Almighty is guaranteed to them by their helplessness, if borne patiently and with confidence in Him.

But even greater than this, perhaps, are the other

gifts which this meekness secures. St. Paul emphasizes this virtue as necessary for the dispensation of graces, above all for granting the gift of the true faith. He writes: "See your vocation, brethren, that there are not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble: but the foolish things of the world [those foolish to the mind of the world] hath God chosen, that he may confound the wise: and the weak things hath God chosen, that he may confound the strong: and the base things of the world [people of the lower classes of society]. And the things that are contemptible hath God chosen, and the things that are not [the slaves who had no status in society and were not even called by their own names] that he might bring to naught the things that are [persons who are free, possess rights, whose existence is recognized in society]: that no flesh should glory in his sight" (1 Cor. 1,26–29).

*Applications.* 1) The "folly of the cross" is the principle dominating Christianity. God chooses "the things that are not," the slaves, the disfranchised, the people "without a personality," as they are styled in the Roman law; He rejects "the things that are," the men of great account in the political and social world. In trying to obtain for the Church in modern society some recognition from the great ones, let us not over-estimate the influence thus to be gained. It too frequently is but cold esteem or even mere fear on the part of those who are neither able nor willing to understand and accept her

spirit, but will yield to her only as much recognition as they concede to any powerful organization which can further or injure their interests. Such secular influence may flatter our vanity, but the real good it secures may not be in proportion to the price it costs, and we may be expected to pay for it in a coin which conscience forbids us to use.

2) It is not good for most of us to have too much personal influence. We are only too apt to lose the good intention in our work and use our power for selfish ends. It is better for us to be ignored and meet from time to time with contradiction, opposition, and humiliation. Our position in the Church gives us a kind of superiority which is apt to beget a measure of mild conceit. What an important part have opposition and even contempt played in the lives of the Saints! They advanced them in virtue and they did not prevent the real success of their undertakings for God. Who suffered more from contempt and opposition than St. Teresa of Avila? And yet, that weak woman brought about the reformation of two religious orders and founded more than thirty monasteries and convents, despite the opposition of many men in the highest positions in the Church. It is hard for human nature to see how persons of prudence and sanctity misunderstand our best intentions. Conscious of being animated by holy desires, we naturally feel that they ought to be recognized. It is not malice on their part, if they oppose us; it is the limitation of human nature that they cannot see our point of view. Perhaps nobody ever met with more opposition than St. Paul. But in spite of many handicaps, he could

say in all truth that he had achieved more than any other Apostle; but he correctly added: "Yet not I, but the grace of God with me" (I Cor. 15,10).

3) This holy "meekness" is above all necessary for those who live and work under canonical or religious obedience. If we consider this obedience only with natural eyes, it must appear formidable. For we do not know what is in store for us when we take the vow. The Superior may be kindly disposed towards us; but he may also have an insurmountable prejudice against us. But "blessed are the meek: for they shall possess the land." Our lack of power is our greatest assurance of God's help and of real happiness.

### D. Holy Seriousness

"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted."

The natural man believes that freedom from care and grief and a full measure of worldly pleasures are essential for contentment and happiness, while seriousness and depression of spirit infallibly make one miserable. Christ teaches that the contrary is true.

Let us ask for the grace of rendering ourselves worthy of the divine consolations by a holy seriousness.

Isaias, Ezechiel, Sophonias, and other prophets describe the blessings of the Messianic Kingdom as consolations and the Redeemer as the great consoler;

(cf. Isa. 61,1–3; Ezech. 9,14; Soph.3,18 according to the Hebrew text). They say that only those who mourn will become participators in the graces of the Redemption. We need not remark that the Lord is not speaking of maudlin sentiments, a natural melancholy or a natural sorrow and grief, which are caused by the loss of temporal blessings or other afflictions. Christ has reference to acts and a disposition of mind, heart and will, which spring from supernatural motives and are the result of divine grace. The commentators, following the indications given about this holy sadness in the prophecies of the Old Testament, tell us that the motives of this virtue are of three kinds: the trials which God sends or permits in this life; secondly, our own sins and the sins of others; and thirdly, our exile from Heaven, in as far as it separates us from God and is the cause of continual dangers for giving in to our evil passions and offending God. Concerning the nature of this sadness they teach that it consists in a certain seriousness of mind which has two functions: negatively, it prevents us from being engrossed in earthly pleasures and carried away by the desire for amusements; positively, it makes us attentive to what in this earthly life is the source of supernatural pensiveness and gravity, and it imposes moderation and reserve in the enjoyment of temporal pleasures, so that we relish them with sobriety and from supernatural motives, check every undue craving for them and do not become altogether absorbed in the natural delight they cause. We may also say that this holy seriousness is the very

contrary of the mad rush for pleasure which characterizes the modern world, converts life into a continuous round of amusements, and makes the satisfaction of the desire for what colloquially is called "a good time" the end and aim of man's existence.

The perfection of this beatitude we behold in the Saints who prayed for crosses and sacrifices. While it would be scarcely advisable on our part to imitate them in this practice before we have achieved a very notable degree of Christian perfection, we ought to strive after what is next to it, namely patiently to accept and virtuously to bear whatever God sends us of interior and exterior sufferings without our asking for them, and above all to bear all those crosses and trials which He imposes against our wish and inclination. But in this we must not try to do the impossible, by attempting not to feel the pain and bitterness of the visitation. For God wants us to suffer; but suffering means to feel pain. We must endure the state of depression with all its poignancy at the expense of effort, and that effort has for its object our not giving way, but "bearing up," "enduring" humbly and perseveringly. This patient endurance we may call the second highest step of the third beatitude. But in order to be able to climb up to it and keep a firm foothold on it, we must first place our foot firmly on the step below this second, which consists in the serious view of life, great moderation in allowing ourselves the pleasures of earth and in being sparing in permitting ourselves "a good time."

Why does Christ make this seriousness a fundamental demand for membership in the Kingdom of God? The principal reason would seem to lie in its being a very necessary and efficacious means to acquire submissiveness to God, which is the quintessence of the Kingdom of Heaven. Prosperity and long continued freedom from trials, an imprudent use of the goods of this earth, a hankering for the pleasures of this world, attach our heart to earth, make us selfish and thus prevent us from being submissive to God.

But this consideration alone would hardly suffice, except in the case of great saints, to keep men constantly in the disposition of this seriousness. Therefore, Christ promises that the mourners "shall be comforted." The world at the time when these words were spoken, in spite of the boisterousness which characterizes paganism, was crying with pathetic violence for peace of mind and heart or, as Horace, a poet of these days, calls it, deliverance from gnawing cares and importunate desires. Now "the Prince of Peace" points out the way to this much desired peace by showing how, what the world deems necessary for contentment, must be avoided, and what it deems the greatest source of interior turmoil, can be changed into the very means for obtaining a peace which is not the stillness of the grave, but delightful rest in God. Those who entertain a serious view of life, avoid frivolousness, overcome the mad desire for amusements, and bear the cross, find that peace which, according to the Apostle, "surpasseth all understanding" (Phil. 4,7).

*Applications.* 1) Only the Son of God could tell us that we must try to profit by every cross by looking at it in the light in which God sees it. But let us not forget that He does not speak of mere individual acts performed at rare intervals and on extraordinary occasions, but of a habitual frame of mind and of acts frequently repeated. Hence, when we are tried by God or man, we must not resign ourselves to the divine pleasure with a tacitly and almost unconsciously added quasi-proviso that this sacrifice will be the last for a good while. That would be giving God a kind of ultimatum and ill suited to our condition here on earth. Let us bear the present cross patiently in the spirit of faith and love, and at the same time keep our heart always ready for further sacrifices without reflecting much about the future. God will not be overexacting in His demands.

2) The Lord impresses us in this beatitude with the necessity of a serious view of life and of restriction and great moderation in the enjoyment of amusements. St. Luke in the parallel text adds this malediction: "Woe to you that now laugh: for you shall mourn and weep" (Luke 6,25). As priests, and still more as religious, it behooves us to be on our guard against the excessive craving for amusements which characterizes our age. Have not the popes and the hierarchy been compelled of late years to enforce regulations which forbid persons consecrated to God to frequent places and partake in amusements of which they would never have thought a few years ago? We must not forget that the sacerdotal and the religious state are essentially penitential. Those who daily celebrate the commemoration of Christ's sufferings and death, must immolate themselves also; and the religious

garb is by its nature a vestment of sacrifice and has for one of its chief purposes to keep its wearers away from worldly amusements.

3) Can we, who are messengers of Christ in the pulpit and classroom, fulfill our complete duty if we do not warn those entrusted to us against the morbid craving for pleasure, nay worse, if we cater to it ourselves? If we must inculcate the spirit of the beatitudes, it certainly is our duty to lead the souls of others to a serious view of life and, by prudent exhortation, promote the holy tendency to employ the pleasures of this world sparingly.

## E. Hunger After Justice

"Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice; for they shall have their fill."

This beatitude is not explained by all commentators in the same way. Some connect it with the preceding ones, others unite it with those that follow. Those who adopt the former view, observing that the preceding ones speak of the various forms of self-denial and the virtues chiefly practiced on what the ascetics call "the purgative way," explain it as patient endurance of injustice. Those who group it with the following three, which deal with virtues of the so-called "illuminative way," interpret it as a desire for spiritual progress. Since both explanations are acceptable, we shall give both. They are not so far apart as one might think; in fact the second includes the first as a practical application of the desire for spiritual progress.

Let us implore the grace of being filled with the spirit of this beatitude.

I. INJUSTICE PATIENTLY BORNE. In the opinion of the first class of commentators mentioned above, the words of our Lord are to be translated in some such way: "Blessed are they who must hunger and thirst after their right," or "they who are unjustly deprived of what is their right and due; for they shall receive satisfaction." For the protection of society God has implanted a sense for right and justice in man's very heart, so that everybody feels indignant when he sees the order of justice violated, even though he is not himself the sufferer. Calamities and trials, even poverty and privations, are comparatively easy to bear, as long as they are not forced upon one by the deliberate misdeeds of others. But when one's right is intentionally violated, one's indignation is roused and one's whole interior stirred up. It is not so much the loss of the concrete object of the right which hurts man's feelings, as the contempt of his person, the "depersonalization," if we may coin a new word, his being put on a level with dumb animals which have no rights, which lies in the unjust act. If, moreover, the perpetrator of the injustice is so powerful or so artful that redress is impossible, the desire for the lost right becomes a veritable hunger and thirst, which promptly change into thirst for revenge and may grow into deadly hatred. How much of this suffering and of this hunger and thirst did not the Lord find in the society of His day!

But now Christ appears on the mountain and demands that the victims of injustice consider themselves lucky and bear their depersonalization cheerfully. He cannot do more to annihilate man; for man's rights, in a way, are equivalent to his person and existence. And yet, one who is perfectly submissive to God, as the citizen of the new Kingdom must be, should be able to suffer this extinction of his personality willingly. For though in relation to men we possess rights, before God and in relation to Him we possess none, except those which He grants by His free promises. He must indeed keep His promises; but He is not unjust if, as the Supreme Lord, He deprives us of every claim which has no direct reference to our last end or the salvation of our soul. He may not condemn any one to eternal punishment who has not deserved it by personal guilt; He may not take away our right to eternal bliss if we comply with the requirements laid down for attaining it; He may not deny us His grace if we are willing to do our part; but He is justified to cancel every other right which has no direct reference to our last end. And He makes use of this power when He demands, as the Savior does here, that we waive those other rights patiently, and gently endure injustice when men inflict it on us. He has the right to forbid vindictiveness, nay to demand love of enemies. This patient and willing endurance of injustice for the sake of God, this gentle and loving submission to "depersonalization" after the example of Christ, who "emptied Himself becoming obedient unto death" and suffered the greatest injustice,

is in a way the perfection of God's reign in the soul, as it is the death of selfishness.

And what is the reward for this beatitude? "They shall have their fill." God will make full satisfaction. How often does He bestow extraordinary favors on those who bear injustice gently and willingly. The lives of the Saints are replete with examples of this kind. Perhaps we know from personal experience what peace of heart a sacrifice of this description is apt to give. The Savior says that they who practice this beatitude "shall have their fill." He seems to indicate that they can draw from the treasury of the Kingdom of God as much as they want. Their hunger will be fully satiated and their thirst fully slaked on the great day of reckoning when every injustice will be righted not in terms of this life, but in terms of eternity. Even here on earth these "depersonalized" men become great personages in the spiritual realm.

*Applications.* 1) Love of enemies and humble forbearance under unjust treatment is a primary duty of the priest and the religious. And yet, the devil and false self-love may tempt us to draw a nice but imaginary distinction between the love of enemies and patient endurance of injustice which are to be practiced by the ordinary Christian, and those which are the duty of a priest and religious. Under the pretext that we must protect the dignity of our state and office, they would have us harbor a certain species of coldness and aversion against the offender, which in reality is vindictiveness and hatred. Nobody possessed greater dignity or held a higher position than

Jesus Christ; but even in the days of His public career He practiced love of enemies and endurance of injustice with the simplicity of the ordinary Christian who has no dignity to preserve.

2) In the four beatitudes considered so far, the Savior proclaims nothing else but the principle of Christian self-denial. But we must not adopt too external, mechanical, and narrow an interpretation, as though it concerned only bodily mortifications. The Lord demands more. He wants man to forget himself completely, and as long as his natural desires and inclinations are not positively approved by God, to treat them as though they did not exist. This self-denial is most complete in the fourth beatitude. Here it becomes a real "killing" (mortification). The small privations which we impose on ourselves, and even the greater sacrifices which we make of our own free resolution, possess real value only in so far as they are expressions of the spirit which animates the fourth beatitude. But the value of the sacrifice is incomparably greater when it is forced upon us without our co-operation, accepted willingly and borne gently. The greatest value belongs to the sacrifice which is caused by an act of real or imagined injustice on the part of others. To be silent and to suffer gently in such a case is the part not of a mere champion, but of a martyr of Christ.

To acquire this spirit, we must first of all pray for it frequently and ardently; for it concerns the hardest sacrifice, the bitterness of which even the Savior felt on Mount Olivet, and which we feel much more because original sin has made us so very selfish and rebellious against God. Secondly, we must make good use of the small occasions

which offer themselves every day. Thirdly, we must make the most of those comparatively few occasions on which a sacrifice of extraordinary magnitude is demanded of us. One such act will advance us farther than all the efforts of many years. Dying is hard; but the Lord Himself went through this agony and merited for us the help necessary to yield up the ghost of the natural man.

II. DESIRE FOR SPIRITUAL PROGRESS. Those commentators who propose another explanation of the fourth beatitude call attention to the worldly, materialistic conception which the Jews entertained about the Messianic Kingdom, and say that Christ wants to correct this error by telling them that only they who have a great and efficacious desire to progress in virtue, a desire which He compares to the combined feelings of hunger and thirst, will witness the realization of their wishes. It is true that the term "justice" is frequently employed in Sacred Scripture to designate holiness or that condition of the soul in which the will and wish of God is the sole norm for all thoughts, desires, words and actions. Justice is that virtue which prompts us to give everybody what is due to him, and must be practiced above all with reference to God.

According to this interpretation, the fourth beatitude contains a censure for the Sadducees, who had no use for any form of holiness, and for the Pharisees, who deemed themselves so perfect as not to need any improvement. But it also condemns that indolence, so natural to man, which prompts him to rest satisfied with what he seems to have accomplished in the service of

God, to let the virtuous practices which were adopted at first with zeal and spirit, become mechanical and give up every effort at further progress.

As said above, this explanation includes the other given before, as a practical application. For since all holiness is death to false selfishness and consists in submission to God's wishes in all things, he who has an ardent desire to become holy, will welcome every means by which this end is accomplished; but it is achieved most efficaciously by bearing injustice gently and willingly.

We may, therefore, translate the beatitude thus: "Blessed are they who have an ardent desire to make progress in every virtue: for they shall be completely gratified." The first reward promised for it consists in the satisfaction of this desire. Here we may think of the satisfaction which spiritual blessings afford, and which never creates surfeit and disgust, as temporal blessings do. But this satisfaction cannot be considered the principal reward which the Savior had in mind. The most important factor is the eternal benefit which this desire creates, a benefit which is, moreover, within the grasp of every man. Many ardently wish to become rich or learned or distinguished in the world, or to gain health or reputation, but their wishes and their efforts are in vain. The desire for spiritual progress, on the contrary, as far as God is concerned, is always fulfilled. If it does not remain an empty wish on our part, we always advance in holiness here on earth and thus secure greater distinction and happiness in eternity.

*Application.* Wherein does our spiritual progress consist and, consequently, what are we to wish for? Evidently it is no mere vague fancy for saintliness, which leads to no effort on our part. Progress for the beginner in spiritual life consists in this, that he gradually widens the field of his interior activity. He ought to commence with the practice of one or the other solid virtue and the eradication of fully deliberate venial sins and the grosser faults of character. Gradually he will devote his efforts to the practice of more virtues, but at the same time not neglect to purify his soul from the smaller faults of his character. He will try to rid himself of imperfections, wrong inclinations and defects in his good actions and to reduce the number of semi-deliberate venial sins and negligences. When he has succeeded in this and may be classed among the more advanced, he cannot and need not constantly add new virtuous practices, but must devote his attention to obtaining greater purity of intention and a clearer and more conscious realization that he serves God, and strive to work more with his will and less with his feelings. But the desire for perfection, as a supernatural virtue, must be based on supernatural motives and supported by confidence not in his own strength, but in the help of God, who must "work both to will and to accomplish" (Phil. 2,13). The purification of motives consists in this, that while losing sight neither of the punishments nor of the rewards of God he accustoms himself more and more to act from the motive of perfect charity, in other words, that he understands better and better how every good work gives a real pleasure to the Father in Heaven, and that he is anxious to give joy to the good God infinitely worthy of all love.

COLLOQUY. Thanksgiving for the lesson our Lord has given us in these beatitudes; sorrow for the faults committed against them; a resolution to act according to the lights received; a petition for the necessary graces, above all for the grace of being able to say with Christ: "Thy will be done, not mine."

## Meditation 6

### THE DISTINGUISHING MARKS OF THE CITIZENS OF GOD'S KINGDOM

(Matt. 5,7–10)

"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice's sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

In the four preceding beatitudes the Savior frees the human heart from all inclinations which militate against the spirit of His Kingdom; in the next four He fills it with the inclinations proper for a child of God. As the plan of establishing the Kingdom of God originated in the merciful love of the Most Holy Trinity, the distinguishing mark of its citizens must be all-controlling love. Consequently the Savior demands in the fifth beatitude a heart sympathetic with the sufferings of others, in the sixth a conscience full of respect for their rights, in the seventh a devotion energizing itself in cheerful and generous work for their happiness, and in the eighth forbearance with the malice of the enemies of this Kingdom.

This is the interpretation which some commentators give of the four last beatitudes. But quite a number prefer another explanation of the sixth and eighth. All authors of note reject that interpretation of the sixth according to which the Lord is said to speak of chastity; for the expression "pure of heart" is never used in the Sacred Scriptures in this meaning. But many maintain that He refers to interior sinlessness in opposition to the mere external and levitical righteousness which the Pharisees deemed sufficient. We shall consider this explanation as well as that sketched above. About the eighth beatitude some authors assert that it cannot claim this title in the same sense as the other seven. They hold that with it Christ begins a new division of His sermon and passes to a different subject. Consequently they speak of only seven beatitudes. But since the best authorities as well as the common opinion of the Church do not favor this explanation, we shall not consider it.

Let us ask the Lord to inflame our hearts with that charity of which the four beatitudes speak.

### A. Sympathy with the Sufferings of Others

"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy."

By their sinful and selfish inclinations men are separated not only from God, but from one another. While they frequently consider the good fortune and success of others their own loss, they look upon the misery of

others as something that does not concern them at all. This is a part of that lamentable breach and opposition in creation caused by the fall in Paradise. Christ became the Word Incarnate to heal this breach and to re-unite men not only with God, but also with their fellow-men, by making them children of God and brothers to one another, He Himself being "the first born amongst many brethren" (Rom. 8,29). Here on the mountain He begins to gather men into His Kingdom and to make them feel at home in the house of the God of mercies. Therefore, they must also feel like brothers towards one another.

This brotherly spirit must induce them to feel the sufferings of others as their own, and this sympathy must lead to kind actions, in other words to Christian mercy, which in several regards differs from the natural virtue of the same name. Every human being, unless monstrously selfish, is urged by a natural impulse to relieve misery at sight. And here let us not forget that to bestow alms and help from one's superabundance is a strict obligation, imposed by the natural law on all men, pagans as well as Christians. But the Christian virtue of mercy differs from the natural virtue of human commiseration, first of all by the motive which inspires it. The ultimate motive of natural mercy is our common fellowship in human nature, which nowhere impresses us more potently than at the sight of suffering. Christ, with His deep knowledge of human nature, uses this natural feeling as a starting point, but does not stop here. For Him God is the only motive in all that is

to be done, and the only norm by which all things are to be measured. He teaches the Christian believer to realize that, if he truly loves God, he must also love the children of God. The Christian has to see in the sufferer a child of God and a brother in Christ, and for this reason must try to help him. Moreover, he is conscious of the abundance of mercy he has received from the Father in Heaven, and of his constant need for more: how can he expect mercy if he hardens his heart against the needs of his brother?

Secondly, Christian mercy differs from natural mercy in the extent to which it goes. The Savior not merely gave to us from His superabundance, but stinted Himself to relieve our misery. Therefore, His follower must also "give till it hurts," deprive himself for the relief of suffering brethren of what may be justly considered a necessity, make sacrifices and put himself to trouble and inconvenience.

And what is the reward? "They shall obtain mercy." By cheerfully and generously relieving the sufferings of others, the merciful put themselves in the proper disposition for graces not due to them. Is it not a matter of frequent experience that people who harden their hearts against the sufferings of others, become victims of the same need, and find neither help nor sympathy? And likewise, that those who judge sinners harshly and make their faults known without necessity, sooner or later fall deeply? Contrariwise, it is also a matter of experience that even great sinners die a pious death because they made the relief of poverty and suffering a real

concern, not merely an occasional practice. Saintly persons are lenient in judging others and generous in relieving corporal and spiritual needs. God's mercy in life and death is the reward of the merciful. The verdict which the Divine Judge will pronounce on us on the last day is determined by the mercy we have practiced or failed to practice in this life.

*Application.* Works of mercy such as sympathy, help, consolation, leniency in judging, patience in bearing with the faults of others, putting the kindest interpretation possible on the doings of others, are above all the duty of priests and religious. But we must not forget that the motto is: "Help till it hurts." The demands made in the interest of mercy on our time, convenience, are real burdens, but burdens necessarily connected with our vocation.

### B. Interior Righteousness

"Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God."

1. HONESTY. In explaining the beatitudes we must not forget that the Sermon on the Mount was addressed to an audience which was well acquainted with the phraseology of the Old Testament and naturally understood the Savior's words in the sense in which they are employed in "the Law and the Prophets." Now the expression "Clean of heart" and its synonyms not only occur, but are clearly explained in three psalms which the Israelites recited frequently. In Psalm 23 they

prayed: "Who shall ascend into the mountain of the Lord: or who shall stand in his holy place? The innocent of hands and clean of heart, who hath not taken his soul in vain (whose mind and desires are not bent upon empty things), nor sworn deceitfully to his neighbor." Psalm 14, (1–3); Psalm 25, (1.4.6.9.10–12) are similar in contents to Psalm 23. Moreover, we have to consider not only the explanation which the Psalmist gives of the purity of heart required for being permitted to approach God, but also the very significant fact that the reward which Christ in His beatitude and the Royal Singer in his psalms promise to the clean of heart, is exactly the same.

From all these considerations it would seem to follow that the Savior uses the term "cleanness of heart" in the same sense as the Psalmist. Consequently, the full meaning of the sixth beatitude is this: "Blessed are they who have a tender conscience for the rights of others; who, as the Psalmist says, shun every semblance of injustice and refuse to have anything to do with people that practice lying, duplicity, and deceit; but who, on the contrary, scrupulously respect all the rights and interests of their neighbors." Fraternal charity becomes difficult when our neighbor's gain is our loss. Nature will prompt us to prefer our own interest to that of our neighbor, even when this can be done only at the expense of fairness; Christ wants us to have such a control over our selfishness that we do not place our own advantage, even in thought and desire, above that of our neighbor, but do to him what we naturally

and justly would wish him to do for us under similar conditions.

The reward of this beatitude is: "They shall see God." These words, too, must be understood in the meaning in which Christ's audience took them. Hence, they do not directly and solely refer to the beatific vision. The kings of the Orient used to live in deep seclusion; no ordinary mortal was permitted to see their face or approach them. This was the privilege of a few "confidants of majesty." For Israel, God was the greatest monarch, a "hidden God." Therefore, it was considered a high privilege even to enter the outer courts of His palace, the temple, and this distinction could be enjoyed only by those who were levitically clean. For the same reason the lines and limits were exactly laid out beyond which lay-persons might not approach "the Holy," while only levitically clean priests were permitted to enter it. Access to the Holy of Holies, where God at times manifested His presence in a particular manner, was allowed only to the high priest, and even he could enter only on solemn occasions.

This external concealment was a type of the spiritual "hiddenness" of Yahweh. The Israelites did not enjoy that intimacy with Him which the New Kingdom of God was to establish. The revelations of the Old Testament did not give that clear knowledge of God, His nature, the Trinity, the plans of Providence, the supernatural order, which prevails in the New Testament. Moreover, according to the teaching of the Church, in all the "theophanies" or apparitions of God vouchsafed

to people under the Old Dispensation, no Divine Person appeared or spoke directly to the men favored with those heavenly communications, but angels spoke and acted as divine ambassadors. God began to speak in person only when Christ appeared on earth. But did not all the Israelites in Christ's time see and hear God? They saw and heard Him only as man, except those who believed in Him and observed the beatitudes; the essential feature of "seeing God" was denied to them.

What, then, is meant by "seeing God"? It is the intimacy which lies in the inspirations of grace when accepted with faith, hope, and charity. To be favored with inspirations and to accept them in the proper spirit, so that they become a real intercourse with God and establish the intimacy with Him which can be compared to the familiarity existing between a father and his beloved child, demands honesty and sincerity. As no earthly father will favor a person with his intimacy when he knows that the latter cheats and wrongs his child, so God will not communicate with one who deceives and wrongs His children.

*Application.* May we not perhaps find here a reason why at times God seems so far away and Heaven appears closed against us? Aridity may have many causes. It may be a trial sent by God; it may be due to bodily infirmity, to care and worry, to dissipation of mind, to sins and infidelity in God's service. But it may also be due to a lack of that purity of heart of which the Savior speaks, in other words to selfishness in dealing with our fellow-men, to duplicity, insincerity, and other faults which mar

charity. Selfish diplomacy, want of regard for others, the tendency of making others merely instruments for the promotion of our private interests, lack of an accommodating spirit, the habit of viewing everything only from the point of our personal profit or convenience, unwillingness to co-operate in any plan in which we are not assigned a leading part, at times lie deeply hidden and may even be found in persons who have already attained some degree of spirituality. Besides habitual aridity in prayer, for which we cannot fully account by the reasons quoted, a good way for discovering whether we are tainted by want of "cleanness of heart" consists in examining whether people trust us and ask for our advice, whether they approach us for the purpose of soliciting our co-operation in an undertaking and whether children and the young trust us. Nobody discovers the selfish, insincere, diplomatic person more quickly than the young; they have a veritable instinct in this matter.

II. PURITY OF SPIRIT. As said before, many interpreters prefer another explanation of the sixth beatitude, which, however, includes the one just given as a practical application. They say that in this beatitude the Lord takes issue with the false notion of the Pharisees that true sanctity consists in observing external levitical purity, which may be coupled with grave vices. The Lord calls them men "within full of rapine and uncleanness" (Matt. 23,25; cf. Mark 7,3.4; Matt. 23,23–25). Combining many data of the same nature found in the gospels, not a few authors explain the cleanness of heart demanded by Christ in the sixth beatitude as

freedom from sin and evil inclinations, and as purity of intention. The latter is a necessary consequence of the former. For if we want to remove from our soul everything that stains it, we must avoid whatever is imperfect and lacks the proper order. In this regard the proper intention in all we do plays an important part. Our heart must be centered in God, not in self, if we wish to be members of the Kingdom of God, and in all things seek only to please His Divine Majesty. This "cleanness of heart" is diametrically opposed to the intriguing, dishonest, artful spirit which characterized the Pharisees. Therefore, we may say with good reason that even if the first interpretation should not entirely and exclusively be the one intended by Christ, it certainly belongs to a full understanding of the sixth beatitude.

The reward of the beatitude understood in this sense is to be explained in the same way as in the first interpretation. We may add that experience shows how all who do not deal honestly with God and earnestly strive to cleanse their heart from evil inclinations and to act with a pure intention, lack the life-giving knowledge of supernatural truths which is the reward of spotlessness of soul and purity of intention.

*Application.* To attain this "cleanness of heart" we must make serious efforts to cleanse our soul from all sins, imperfections, and faulty inclinations, and to perfect the intention of our resolutions and actions. To gain the latter point we must try to act more and more from

perfect love of God and frequently renew our good intention. However, caution must be exercised in the last mentioned point. Our endeavor should consist in renewing the good intention about once an hour or when passing from one kind of occupation to another. If God wants more, He will call us more frequently and the act of making a good intention will arise spontaneously without effort on our part. If we try to remain constantly in a kind of recollection similar to prayer, without having a special grace for it, we shall only ruin ourselves.

But let us not forget that exterior faultlessness and regularity can exist together with a poorly controlled imagination, a selfish heart, and a proud mind.

### C. Sincere Benevolence

"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." "Peace" in Sacred Scripture is a synonym for happiness and the undisturbed enjoyment of prosperity. Hence the Messianic Kingdom is often proposed by the prophets under the image of peace and the Messias is called "the Prince of Peace." Therefore, "the peacemakers" are they who bring happiness, cheerfully work for the welfare of others, and above all, they who reconcile enemies, put an end to strife, bring sinners back to God.

But as Christ, the great Peace-Maker, could accomplish His task only at the expense of His life, so His followers can perform their part in this mission of peace only by dint of many sacrifices. They must forget their personal interests, often humble themselves

and swallow insults and rebuffs—in a word, be unselfish.

The reward held out for this beatitude is the highest possible one: "They shall be called children of God." Scripture often uses the expression "to be called" in the sense of being in a marked degree what the appellation signifies. Consequently Christ here means that the "peace-makers" will be children of God by preeminence, or His favorite children. Their reward finds its proper illustration in the intimate relations which exist between a loving father and his beloved child.

*Application.* In this beatitude we priests and religious should find a powerful motive for devoting ourselves to the task of bringing peace and contentment to the poor world rent by strife and oppressed by so much spiritual and corporal misery. Let us not forget that it requires much tact, patience, prudence, charity, in a word, self-forgetfulness.

### D. Patience of Martyrs

"Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice's sake: for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven."

Victims of persecution for justice's sake are first of all those who by other men are subjected to bodily and mental sufferings, to privations, losses, chicanery, merely because they refuse to trangress the law of God or because they have done something that was their duty, or at least pleasing to God. The persecutors are prompted by evil passions, mistaken zeal or bigotry.

Often enough it happens that they are goaded on by the devil.

But there is still another kind of persecution for justice's sake. Virtuous people, above all such as work assiduously and successfully for the salvation of souls, at times are suspected and misundertood, their work is misinterpreted, condemned, subjected to odious restrictions or entirely stopped. This kind of persecution always has played an important part in the sanctification of souls and the spread of the Kingdom of God.

The Savior demands that this persecution be "suffered," i. e., borne gently and willingly, without harboring a spirit of vindictiveness, indignation, or self-commiseration. The people thus persecuted are to consider it an unmerited privilege and a great blessing, and bear it with an anxious desire to please the Father in Heaven, who sent the tribulation. Lest anybody think that we carry into Christ's words an element foreign to them, we here subjoin the explanation St. Peter gives of them when addressing the Christians during the first great persecution under Nero. As the Douay version is not very clear, we give a translation in modern English. "Dearly beloved, the conflagration, which has broken out among you for your probation, must not surprise you, as though something strange happened to you. On the contrary, since you now have a part in Christ's sufferings, you ought to rejoice, in order that you may be able to triumph on the day on which the Savior's glory will be manifested. If you are reviled for Christ's sake, all is well with you, because the spirit of

God rests on you. It is self-understood that no one among you ought to be compelled to suffer a well deserved punishment for having committed murder or theft or a misdemeanor or usurpation. But if one is punished for being a Christian, he need not be ashamed, but let him glorify God for this title" (1 Pet. 4,12–16).

This again is a specifically Christian virtue, unknown to the world till Jesus taught and practiced it. The Israelites in bygone days were also persecuted for justice's sake; but the highest point they could reach was the spirit of the Machabees, who rose in holy indignation against their persecutors and preferred to die fighting rather than to see the desolation caused by the Grecian kings. The Christian hero is to suffer like Christ, who "is led as a sheep to the slaughter: and like a lamb without voice before his shearers, so openeth not his mouth" (Is. 53,7).

In the reward held out for this beatitude Christ returns to the promise made for the first; for the work of annihilating self and establishing God's rule in the human heart is begun by the practice of the first and consummated by that of the eighth. Self-chosen mortifications and humiliations are not as painful and, we might say, as annihilating as the pain and degradation which lie in gently bearing persecution. Moreover, the Christian victim of persecution has often to forego what is dearest to him and what he is not permitted to give up by his own free choice, namely, his reputation, the happiness of his relatives, the chance to work for Christ. He is really the best and noblest citizen in the

Kingdom of God, which is the greatest privilege man can enjoy on earth.

Moreover, as St. Gregory of Nyssa remarks, the Kingdom of Heaven has a special reward for these sufferers in the "aureole" of the martyrs, the domination, power and other distinctions which they enjoy in Heaven, and by which the injustice they have suffered is righted with the generosity which befits the Eternal King.

*Application.* We must not be surprised if at times we experience opposition because we try to live up to the requirements of our state and the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, or because we are working zealously and successfully for souls. The devil is a pastmaster in raising confusion and difficulties, and by his cunning succeeds at times in making even good people do his work for him. It need hardly be said that we must always obey the directions of superiors and confessors and be very prudent. If their decision should clearly contravene a genuine inspiration from God, we ought to follow them. For, as Christ revealed to St. Teresa of Avila and other Saints, He suspends or retracts even a clear command He gave in a private revelation, when the lawful human authority decides against it. This doctrine, however, does not rest on mere private revelations, but is a corollary of the truth that God leads men to Heaven through other men, and for this purpose endows those with real authority on whose guidance we depend. But as long as we comply with this requirement, we must be independent of the sayings and doings of others.

COLLOQUY. Acts of thanksgiving for the lessons Christ has taught us in these beatitudes; of petition for copious graces in order to practice them faithfully; of oblation for the perfect imitation of the Savior. "Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart: and you shall find rest to your souls" (Matt. 11,29).

## Meditation 7

### THE KINGDOM OF THE WORLD AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

(Matt. 5,11.12)

"Blessed are ye when they shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you, untruly, for my sake: be glad and rejoice: for your reward is very great in heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets that were before you."

While persecution will be the lot of many a true citizen of the Kingdom of God here on earth, it will in a much higher degree be the share of the Apostles, its official representatives and main supports. However, far from being a reason for despondency, this consideration should be a source of special joy because of the great reward awaiting the persecuted in eternity and because of the certitude it affords them of their being true disciples of the Savior. This certitude, according to Christ, arises from the fact, confirmed by history, that in the past every true prophet has been persecuted on account of the essential opposition between the kingdom of the world and the Kingdom of God.

Let us ask for the grace of gauging this world with its joys and sorrows according to the eternal standard of God, in order that we may deserve the hatred of the world and the love of God.

I. "Blessed are ye when they shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you, untruly, for my sake." The scene we are to witness now is one of the grandest in the Gospel. The Savior changes His form of speech from the more impersonal and general to that of an apostrophe, which, as the sequel shows, is primarily, though not exclusively, addressed to the Apostles and their successors. In the eight beatitudes He has proclaimed the constitution of His Kingdom. The spirit sketched in these eight brief sentences is to assume a visible shape in the Church founded on the Twelve. All the beatitudes will be verified above all in the Apostles and those who will take their place in future ages; but we might say, the eighth in them will shine forth most eminently; so much so that persecution and the manner in which it is borne will serve as a landmark for all who wish to come to His Kingdom. The world cannot but show its hostility against God and truth. It always hails false prophets with great acclaim; but whenever a true messenger of God appears, he invariably becomes the victim of insults, calumnies, and persecution. History proves this. "So they have persecuted the prophets that were before you." Thus persecution has always been the proof and credential of the true messenger of God.

Moreover, it is not only persecution by means of violence, which the Savior mentions as a credential; for He adds: "They shall revile you and speak all that is evil untruly ["lyingly" says the Greek text, therefore with conscious malice] for my sake." As a rule, a campaign of calumny and conscious misrepresentation is more effective than one of fire, sword, and robbery. The latter disgusts too many and sets them thinking; the former is the best means to dupe the credulous masses and to turn away those in the higher walks of life, who are sensitive in every point of respectability. Nor must we overlook the important addition: "for my sake." The sole reason for trumping up those false charges and broadcasting those vilifications is the fact that the persons thus calumniated preach and practice the doctrine of Christ; and this, too, a careful observer will be able to discover. Therefore, the followers of Christ, and above all the apostles in all ages, must not be surprised and become indignant, but consider such treatment a positive gain. "Blessed are ye."

*Applications.* 1) A campaign of calumny enacted against the Church or our state of life should confirm us in our faith and love for the Bride of Christ and for our vocation. Let us not be anxious for recognition and praise by non-Catholic publications and organizations. Here, too, the word of St. Paul holds good: "If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Gal. 1,10).

2) Does it not often happen that a zealous priest is maligned for doing his duty? O you true apostle of Christ,

be not afraid of this persecution, as long as you have only done your duty and not violated the laws of Christian prudence. Possess your soul in patience and trust in God. That persecution will not harm you in the sight of God nor impede your true efficiency. Rather expect that a trial of some kind will come every time you have been privileged to render God a special service or to do something out of the ordinary toward saving souls. The fury of the devil has been roused, and he will have revenge. But God will see that he does not go too far. And when a Sister in the hospital or in the schoolroom has succeeded in stopping a scandal or bringing a hardened sinner back to God, she must not marvel at the trouble or misunderstanding which befalls her soon after. Satan will vent his hatred against her; but he is under God's control.

II. "Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven." The Kingdom whose fundamental law is contained in the eight beatitudes, is in the first place an organization here on earth. Membership, and still more an official position in it, means self-denial down to annihilation of self, and as reward for this one is often misjudged, reviled, persecuted. In spite of all this, the Savior tells those who make the sacrifices and suffer the persecution: "Be glad and rejoice." Even here on earth the true disciple of Christ is happier than the worldling and the slave of Satan; instead of earthly pleasures he possesses the greatest of all temporal goods, peace with God and with his own conscience.

However, the Kingdom of God is not restricted to this life; it attains its consummation and full develop-

ment in the other world. There the faithful champion of Christ will receive the reward of all his sacrifices and sufferings. His "reward will be very great in heaven." We must never estimate the value of human life merely according to its temporal appearance on earth; for by doing so we neglect the most important factor. Earthly labor, earthly sorrow, and earthly joy can be properly estimated only in the light of eternity.

*Application.* Pure love of God ought to be the principal motive of priests and religious for patiently bearing the toils, troubles and persecutions of this world. But they not only may, but must, think of the heavenly reward. For it is precisely the Apostles whose thoughts Jesus directs to Heaven when He foretells what their lot will be on earth. And yet, is it not true that not only lay people, but priests and religious, think rather rarely of Heaven? One reason why the thought of it is not as familiar to us as it ought to be, would seem to lie in the fact that we conceive our going to Heaven not as that moral certainty which it is through God's grace and all the means at our disposal, but as a lucky chance, "if all goes well with us in our last hour." Our disposition of mind ought to be like that of the circumspect and courageous business man, who, whilst fully realizing that great efforts are ahead of him, nevertheless goes into an enterprise full of trust and keeps success as a moral certainty before his mind all the time. The words of the Apostle: "With fear and trembling work out your salvation" (Phil. 2,12) mean that we must realize how necessary earnest efforts and serious circumspection are in the work of salvation and that no foolish risks should be

taken; but they do not exhort us to harbor Jansenistic diffidence and imagine that we have more luck than sense if we reach Heaven.

COLLOQUY. Offer yourself to your Savior for every cross God sees fit to send you; beg for the grace of valuing everything earthly according to the proper standard, and for the Christian hope which overcometh the world. "If in this life only, we hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, the first-fruit of them that sleep: for by a man came death, and by a man the resurrection of the dead" (1 Cor. 15,19–21).

## Meditation 8

### THE SALT OF THE EARTH AND THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

(Matt. 5,13–16)

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt lose its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is good for nothing any more but to be cast out, and trodden on by men. You are the light of the world. A city seated on a mountain cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but upon a candlestick, that it may shine to all that are in the house. So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify the Father who is in heaven."

The words of this pericope are chiefly addressed to the Apostles, though in a manner they concern all Christians. In three comparisons they express a duty which is incumbent chiefly on the Apostles, but to some extent also on all the faithful, namely, to work for the preservation and spread of the Kingdom of God in the whole world. At the same time Jesus stresses the truth that the Messianic Kingdom is instituted not for Israel alone, but for the whole world, and points to the sad fate which awaits those who lose the spirit of their vocation to the faith and the apostolate.

Let us ask for the grace that we and all who assume the duties of the apostolate may always bear in mind that the interests of God, the welfare of the Church, and the eternal destiny of souls are entrusted to us.

I. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE APOSTOLIC VOCATION.

A. A THREEFOLD DUTY. "You are the salt of the earth." How much can Christ say in one brief sentence! Here He expresses for the first time the world-wide mission of the Apostles and of the Church, and brings out three very important functions of the apostolate, which He likens to the effects produced by salt: seasoning, curing, preserving. Salt is one of the most necessary ingredients of food, without which many a dish is unpalatable and unwholesome. The Savior implies that the apostle must render his own life and work and that of others pleasing to God and supernaturally meritorious. Salt has, moreover, a healing effect. In solution it is used as an antiseptic. In the Old Testament we read how Eliseus threw salt into the spring of Jericho, the water of which could not be used for drinking, and "the waters were healed unto this day" (4 Kings 2,20–22). How much is there in this world of sin, and vice which needs the healing power of the apostle!

Finally, salt keeps food in a fit condition. All organic matter easily perishes; man must take energetic measures against the disintegrating forces which are at work in nature. In the Palestinian household of Christ's day salt was the chief preservative. As organic matter, so

the moral life of man deteriorates and dies unless the proper means are employed against the influences which threaten from within and without—the weakness of our nature, the difficulty of the work, the example of those with whom we live, the temptations of the devil. It is the apostle who must preserve the religious life and the Christian spirit, the integrity of faith and the vigor of virtue.

*Applications.* 1) Nobody can describe the responsibility of priests and religious more graphically than Christ does here. They have to wage a campaign against the moral corruption of the world. Both in themselves and in others they have to fight every passion, even the most aggressive. May we risk such a battle? Most assuredly, provided Christ puts us at our post and God calls us to the work. As long as we act after taking the advice of our spiritual director, and have at least the free and willing consent, if not the positive order, of our superiors, whom we have informed of everything they ought to know, we must never mistrust the grace of our vocation. But it is of vital importance that we leave to the superiors the disposal of our person, and the choice of the place and the work we are to do. When a priest or a religious has secured a position or a kind of work merely by importuning superiors or using "political" means, he often discovers that God's grace is not with him, that he achieves little, nay, at times that the position or work is positively harmful to him, that he has obtained by all his trouble only disappointments and failure.

2) We not only may, but in a way must, promote sacerdotal and religious vocations, though with great prudence. We must have the moral certainty that the persons whom we try to influence, possess the required qualities. The priesthood and the religious state are no reformatories. They never free one from bad habits, but only make the good better. Let us also be careful not to trespass upon the rights which bishops and the authorities of religious orders possess in admitting and rejecting candidates for the priesthood and the religious state. They may accept only such as are fit; but they are not obliged to receive every one that is fit. The aptitude of a candidate presupposed, in accepting him they have to consider only the good of the diocese or of the institution entrusted to their care, and of this they are the sole arbiters. Admission in all these cases is a free gift, to which not even the best moral and mental qualifications give the applicant a right or claim. And when they dismiss persons from the seminary or the novitiate, we must not accuse them of injustice and move heaven and earth to have the dismissed person reinstated. The presumption always is in favor of the authorities. The account which the seminarian or novice gives of the matter, is only too often,—inculpably perhaps, but nevertheless very effectively—colored. Respectful intercession in behalf of the dismissed candidate may be in order, but nothing more.

B. LOSS OF THE PROPER SPIRIT. "But if the salt lose its savor, wherewith will it be salted? It is good for nothing any more, but to be cast out, and trodden on by men." It is immaterial whether or not natural salt

can lose its savor. Christ merely makes the supposition and asks what will be the consequences. Even though natural salt cannot spoil, it is certain that the apostle can lose the ability for rendering those services to the world which Jesus compares to the services of salt in the Palestinian household. The people of His time had no substitute for salt; therefore, if it lost its strength, insipidness and decomposition of food, loss of the only remedy for certain diseases and other distressing consequences became unavoidable.

But the woe which ensues if the apostle loses the spirit of his vocation or the spirit of the beatitudes, is infinitely greater. Only by a veritable and very exceptional miracle of grace can the laity remain good where the clergy and the religious have become indifferent. This calamity cannot overtake the entire Church at one and the same time; but, as history proves, it can afflict considerable portions of it. What will happen to the apostle who has lost the spirit of his vocation? Christ says that the salt which has lost its savor "is good for nothing any more, but to be cast out, and be trodden on by men." These words become appallingly true in the case of a priest or religious who lives in the state of mortal sin. If he does not lose his faith altogether and fall away from the Church, he cannot avoid multiplying sins and sacrileges and is of little or no benefit to others, nay, often of positive detriment to them. For the loss of Christ's spirit which disfigures his soul, will hardly escape notice, and while some of the laity may pity him, others will be scandalized, and

from disgust and indignation proceed to scorn and contempt. He will be "cast out and trodden on by men." Would to God that this contempt struck only the guilty person and not the entire sacred state and the Church!

But Christ's words become true also in the case of an apostle who has become tepid and worldly. For hated by God and men must be he who casts his gauntlet to the world of sin and infidelity and then brings to the fight, instead of the power, the principles, and the graces of Christ, which alone can overcome the foe, only a worldly mind, worldly manners and habits, worldly considerations, in short the very evils against which he is to battle. That man will be ground to pieces between the hostile powers; he will be cast out and trodden on.

II. EXCELLENCE OF THE APOSTOLIC VOCATION. "You are the light of the world. A city seated on a mountain cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but upon a candlestick, that it may shine to all that are in the house." The sun is the light of the world. Without it our earth would be in perpetual darkness and deprived of life. All nature is hushed when the sun sets; but the first rays of the reappearing orb are welcomed by a jubilant chorus of little songsters. It gives growth and ripeness. It brings relief to the human sufferer on his couch of pain after a long, sleepless night; it invigorates the convalescent; its light and warmth cheer the healthy and help them in their work.

What the sun is to the material world, the apostle must be to the spiritual world. He is to banish the darkness of sin and religious ignorance, comfort the weary souls, infuse new life into those wasted by the diseases of passions, and give courage and vigor to God's faithful servants.

"A city seated on a mountain cannot be hid." The apostles must make the Church of Christ visible and known to the world; for it is precisely the apostolic office and the apostolic work that show the world the Church which is truly Christ's. They and their labors cannot remain unknown, and the note of "apostolicity" is the surest test for finding the true Church of Christ among all the different denominations that call themselves Christian.

"Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but upon a candlestick, that it may shine to all that are in the house." In the Orient a house has only one room; hence the light kindled in it by its very nature penetrates everywhere, and all the inmates can see by its rays. Christ, like a prudent householder, kindles a light for the whole world in all the representatives of the apostolate and does not put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick or in an elevated position, or, in plain language, He wants the apostles to work openly before the entire world, so that only those will remain in darkness who wilfully close their eyes. History shows how truly the Twelve Apostles and their successors have been such a light to the world. Their holy life caused more conversions than their learning or eloquence.

*Applications.* 1) While Christ clearly and impressively explains to the Apostles, here and on other occasions, the importance and responsibility of their office, He does not fail to call their attention also to its greatness and excellence. We must do the same with regard to our vocation. While fully realizing the weight that is placed on our shoulders, we must also see the beauty and dignity of the state to which we have been called. For in order to be efficient in God's service, we must love and prize our vocation and ever draw new inspiration from it. Our vocation must be one of the most powerful motives for loving God. We ought to thank Him for it every day. It is the grace of which we can say in all truth: "All good things came to me together with it" (Wisdom 7,11).

2) Everyone who is to work for souls must be a "luminary." But then he must be absolutely pure. He must first receive the fullness of the light for himself before he can let it shine into the fog and darkness of the world. No stain, no defilement, no dark spot remain unnoticed in him. For he is also like the city on the mountain, and the abundance of light pervading him, by contrast shows every stain and every dark spot all the more clearly. Faults which are overlooked in others, covered with the mantle of charity, or excused by worldly considerations, are criticized in an apostle. What is passed over in lay people as "human," in the priest and religious is considered scandalous. It will be well for us at times to ask ourselves whether we measure up to the exalted idea the laity have of us; and energetically go about correcting what we find in ourselves to be not in harmony with the just views of good lay people. It will not do

merely to acknowledge to ourselves that we fall short of the world's expectation and then continue in the same rut.

III. BLESSINGS OF THE APOSTOLIC OFFICE. "So let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven." There is so much moral misery in the world that everything weak, faulty, sinful, is called "human." This Christ wants to change. In place of sinful "humanity" He wants to erect a kingdom of virtue. For this reason the Apostles, above all others, are to be made a spectacle which attracts Heaven and earth and is wholly different from the spectacle which sinful mankind offers. Even against their will, the men of the world shall have to acknowledge and admire the virtuous life of the Apostles. They cannot but see that a higher power endows these men, though they are flesh and blood like the rest of mankind, and will be forced to recognize in this the Father in Heaven, to whom the earthly-minded otherwise pay no regard.

But then they see also that this great God desires to be a Father to all men, and thus they find their way back to Him. This at the same time is the happiness of men and the glory of God, the double fruit of a zealous apostolate.

*Application.* We should be sorely deceived did we try to accomplish our God-given mission in any way except that outlined by the Savior. The first step is the good example, "that they may see your good works,"—the ex-

ample which like the sun enlightens and warms. It is, therefore, virtue ennobled by charity, love of God and men. Mankind must learn to love God and neighbor again. Let us examine ourselves as to whether and how we try to love God.

IV. CATHOLICITY OF THE APOSTOLATE. Jesus calls His Apostles "the salt of the whole earth," "the light of the entire world," and compares them to a city situated on a mountain, visible far and wide. He wants to stress the truth that they have a world-wide mission. They must save not only their compatriots, but all nations of the earth. The Mosaic theocracy was intended only for the sons of Abraham, the new Kingdom of God is for the whole world. The strong nationalistic tendency, which was necessary to keep the religion of the Old Testament free from the contaminations of paganism, has no place in the Catholic Church. The power which lies in her doctrine and Sacraments, and the government, which Christ will institute with Peter as the centre of unity, are a sufficient safeguard against the corruption of the world.

*Application.* We must have a heart as wide as the world and be absolutely free from sectional or nationalistic aspirations. It must be enough for us to know that the interests of God and souls are at stake. In our daily prayers and sacrifices we ought to remember the needs of the entire Church, the troubles and persecutions she may have to suffer in any part of the globe, the work of the missionaries among infidel nations. Nor ought we to for-

get the dying, the severely tempted, and the souls that are in spiritual need and have no one to help them.

COLLOQUY. Acts of gratitude for our vocation; oblation of our entire person to the service of Christ. Petition for the apostolic spirit, above all for great charity. "Now there remain faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greater of them is charity (1 Cor. 13,13).

## Meditation 9

### FULFILMENT AND CONSUMMATION

(Matt. 5,17–20)

"Do not think that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy but to fulfill. For amen I say to you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall not pass of the law, till all be fulfilled. He therefore that shall break one of these least commandments, and shall so teach men, shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, that unless your justice abound more than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

After proposing His programme, Christ explains the relation of the new Gospel to the Old Law, first in the principles of both, next in several details. He denies very emphatically that His work is one of destruction. The "Law and the Prophets" are the word of God, and the word of God must remain forever. Not all will correspond with this commandment perfectly; therefore, there will be great ones and small ones in the Kingdom of God. But one thing is absolutely certain: the holiness which the Scribes and Pharisees teach and

practice will not gain admission to the Kingdom of God.

Let us ask for the grace that we be animated by Christian magnanimity, coupled with true humility, and never cease in the earnest endeavor to bring Christ's spirit in us and others to perfection.

1. THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS. "Do not think that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For amen I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall not pass of the law till all be fulfilled." The entire Old Testament with all its institutions, or "the law and the prophets," as the Scriptural term designates it, was a preparation for Christ. God had planned the redemption of the world in a very definite manner and, in order to accomplish His design, had to prepare mankind for it. For this purpose He chose the Israelitic nation from among all the peoples of the earth and made a formal covenant with it. But the Old Testament was incomplete in several regards. First of all, its religious precepts determined only the external worship of God; its moral precepts, by their commands and prohibitions, by the penalties imposed for transgressions, and the rewards held out for faithful observance, aimed at removing the worst excesses of human passions and inculcated only the practice of external acts of virtue. While the Decalogue in the ninth and tenth commandments forbade coveting another man's wife and possessions, the Mosaic legislation provided no sanction

for these precepts. It rendered the transgressor of the other eight commandments liable to various penalties; but for the violation of the ninth and tenth it left only the punishments determined by the natural law, to which the Israelites were subject like the rest of mankind. The essential rewards and punishments for the violation of the natural law belong not to this, but to the next life.

Secondly, the law of Moses merely prepared the legislation which was to come with Christ, and was not an end in itself, like the Christian law. It had a prophetic character, or, as St. Paul says, it was a "forecast shadow" of Christ's law.

Christ did not abolish, but completed the law of Moses. What He abolished were only its limitations, chiefly the two principal ones, its incompleteness and its preparatory and prophetic character. He who completes a building does not tear down the parts erected before, and he who fulfills a promise and a prophecy, does not take them back or render them null and void.

Christ abolished the limitations of the Old Law by extending His moral precepts to internal acts, thoughts and desires, by covering with His commands the entire moral sphere, by making membership in the Kingdom of God possible to all nations, and by conferring real sanctity, not merely legal holiness, as the levitical regulations of Moses did. Moreover, He fulfilled all the prophecies. For all those institutions, which were merely "a shadow of the things to come," now ceased to exist as such. To this class belonged the kingdom

of Israel with its particular laws, the purifications and other observances of the Mosaic code, the promises of external and temporal blessings coupled with obedience to the Mosaic law, and the punishments provided for its violation. The temporal kingdom of Israel was replaced by the spiritual kingdom of His Church and its laws. The ceremonies of ablution, anointing, imposition of hands, used in the purifications and Sacraments of the Old Testament, were kept, but received an efficacy intrinsic to them and conferred interior supernatural holiness and supernatural power instead of the levitical, external purity and the levitical power which the Sacraments instituted by Moses were able to confer. The essence of the sacrifice consists in "the oblation of a visible object made to God by some change in this object, for the purpose of acknowledging God's supreme dominion and our total dependence on Him." This, too, was retained; but the victim to be offered in the sacrifice of the New Law is of infinitely higher value and the sacred act itself possesses an infinitely greater dignity. Finally, all truths which God revealed in the Old Testament, must be believed also under the New Dispensation.

In full justice, therefore, Christ could say: "Do not think that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For amen I say unto you: till heaven and earth will pass, one jot or one tittle shall not pass of the law, till all be fulfilled." Perhaps we can give the meaning of the original

more clearly by saying: "This I tell you: as long as heaven and earth [this visible world] is not destroyed, not a particle, not even a little hook in the letters and not even a line belonging to a character in the Hebrew alphabet, [which was used in writing the books of the Old Testament], will perish until everything has been fulfilled."

The Savior was no revolutionist, but built upon the old institution, even where He put something infinitely better in place of the old and imperfect, even though the Old Testament was so arranged that it had in time to be superseded by His Church, and even though it had sadly degenerated in His day.

*Applications.* 1) Christ here teaches us with what reverence we ought to treat every institution of God, and with what care and respect we ought to make changes which may become advisable. Of the Church and her institutions it is true in a much higher sense that "no jot and no tittle will pass, until all be fulfilled"; for "Jesus Christ, yesterday and today, and the same forever" (Heb. 13,8). Many things in the Church have forms conditioned by the times, above all such as refer only to particular places and circumstances; therefore, they are changeable. Here too it may be advisable to develop further, but we must build upon what is not perfect, and never tear down the old ruthlessly. Much harm is done by ill-advised zeal. If a parish, a religious house, a school, have for years observed some pious custom, it causes bad blood to abolish it by a word of might, even if something undoubtedly

better is introduced in its stead. Build the better up gradually and use the old and less good as a foundation for it.

2) The same applies to our self-improvement. What God has placed in our nature must never be rooted out, but improved. Thus, for instance, an inborn disposition of kindness, an affectionate character, natural nobility of mind, ambition, must not be killed, but given their proper object, such as love of God and neighbor, greatness in the service of God, courage in enterprises for the good of souls.

3) Even where a thorough moral reform is needed, we must not at once ruthlessly tear up everything by the root. First study the good qualities of those who need a reform, then do constructive work instead of merely demolishing what is bad; otherwise you will only produce unsightly piles of debris.

II. GREAT ONES AND SMALL ONES. "He therefore that shall break one of these least commandments, and shall so teach men, shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven. But he that shall do and teach, shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." Here we come to one of the most amiable traits in our Savior's character. He grants nobody the right to transgress or abolish the will of God. But He has due regard for human frailty, and therefore, if one fails in a small point, He does not immediately exclude him from the Kingdom of Heaven. This clemency He exercises not

only with regard to the ordinary members of the Church, but even with regard to the Apostles, when they fail in their work. He who teaches men to disregard small commandments of God, is not deprived of his office, but only placed among "the small" ones in His Kingdom.

But this is not all. Christ never for a moment gives up His demand that all, both those who teach and those who are taught, should strive constantly to let the divine will rule them in everything, in small details as well as in great affairs. But instead of inculcating this demand in tones of severity and by a description of the punishment which will follow selfishness, He appeals in gentle terms to man's inborn desire for nobility and greatness. "He that shall do and teach, shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven"; and in that kingdom there are no empty titles.

*Applications.* 1) How consoling and winning are the patience and considerateness of the Savior! Truly, we serve a good Master. Therefore, let us have confidence; confidence even after great faults committed in our striving after virtue and in the performance of our apostolic duties. Diffidence and loss of courage are a poor requital for so much charity and mercy. Only let us not continue the fault, but with God's grace and help correct the defect and try to become great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

2) We see also how Christ makes use of all natural and supernatural powers in man to induce His Apostles to preach as well as to fulfill God's will in everything, and to

prevail upon those who enter His Kingdom on earth, to comply with even the least command of the Father. For He says that heaven and earth will pass away before even the smallest command of God will be rendered null and void. He insists that He has not come on earth to abolish God's will in the least point; and finally, He appeals to what is noblest in man's nature. God is to be perfect Master of all our thoughts, words, desires, and actions, and our true dignity consists precisely in the degree in which He has this mastery.

3) Jesus shows us how we ought to propose to those under our care such obligations as are hard to nature. The Pharisees and their Christians followers in all ages, notably among them the Jansenists, took a perfect delight in expressing duties and regulations in the harshest possible terms and in dwelling upon the rigor of the law and the punishments for its violation. Christ prefers to propose duties in a gentle manner and to appeal to what is best in men, so that they desire to comply with His rules.

III. SCRIBES AND PHARISEES. "I tell you unless your justice abound more [unless your care to observe God's commandments goes further] than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Despite all His reverence for the Old Law and the valid traditions connected with it, despite all His patience with human frailty, the Savior is very determined and energetic in establishing the New Law, which He is sent to introduce. The Scribes and Pharisees frantically hold on to the letter of the law and the unauthorized "Traditions of the Ancients." They have

made an idol of the dead letter and put it in God's place.

When man does not fashion his moral conduct according to God's image, yet wants to achieve ethical superiority, he invariably refashions God according to man's image and makes a caricature of Him. The leaders of Israel have expelled the spirit of God from the letter of the law and forced their unbridled passions into it. They are zealots, not for the essence and soul of the Old Law, but for the restrictions which it imposes; not for the element which elevates and leads to God, but for slavish bondage in the narrowest, most nationalistic spirit, which separates them from the rest of mankind and can be read into the law of Moses only when interpreted according to the unwarranted and unauthorized "Traditions of the Ancients." By all this they frustrate the real purpose of the Sinaitic legislation, which was the establishment of God's dominion over Israel; for now no longer Yahweh, but the Scribes are the masters. Again, if the Pharisees impose on the simple people this law with the entire "hedge" of narrow restrictions and unnatural interpretations, it is not God who rules, but they who want to be admired by men and bask in the sunshine of a fictitious holiness. Such justice is not only insufficient for admission into the Kingdom of God, but positively prevents it, because it spells the deification of man.

*Applications.* 1) One thing is absolutely necessary for admission into the Kingdom of God, namely, that man submit to the divine will and enter upon the divine de-

signs. Not the letter, but the spirit, not external observances, but internal acts, are the innermost nature of Christ's dispensation. The mind, the will, the heart must belong to God, not merely the body. Not the stern external precept is to animate us, but a loving desire to please the Father in Heaven. We are not to question constantly: "What is the minimum of strict duty?" and then perform it like hired men, who are very particular to please their employer as long as he has his eyes on them, but follow their own inclinations and consult their own convenience wherever they can do so without being scolded, docked, or discharged. Let us examine ourselves whether we really act from a desire to please God or are led on merely by the fear of His punishments or the wish to retain a good opinion of ourselves.

2) Our fidelity in obeying the commandments of God must not degenerate into a calculating, commercial spirit, which, as it were, sends God a bill for everything done according to the strict letter of the law, or into the practice of the Pharisees. These men for their external regularity first collected from men, and after receiving payment in the form of admiration or temporal emoluments, still attempted to collect from God, not indeed spiritual gifts, but temporal blessings. Christ demands the childlike obedience of a dutiful son, who entrusts all, including the reward, to God, leaves it to His wisdom and kindness, and never complains if good works are not repaid here on earth.

COLLOQUY. Acts of gratitude for the lesson Christ gives us here; of love and confidence in His kindness;

of total surrender to God. Resolution to act more and more from perfect love of God. Acts of sorrow for the want of purity in our intention. Petition for the spirit of the children of God. "Yea, Father; for so hath it seemed good in thy sight" (Matt. 11,26).

## Meditation 10

### DEEPENING OF THE LAW

### (Matt. 5,21–32)

"You have heard that it was said to them of old: Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill, shall be in danger of the judgment. But I say to you, that whosoever is angry with his brother, shall be in danger of the judgment. And whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council. And whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. If therefore thou offer thy gift at the altar, and there thou remember that thy brother hath anything against thee: leave there thy offering before the altar, and go first to be reconciled to thy brother, and then coming thou shalt offer thy gift. Be at agreement with thy adversary betimes, whilst thou art in the way with him: lest perhaps the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Amen I say to thee, thou shalt not go out from thence till thou pay the last farthing. You have heard that it was said to them of old: thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say to you, that whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart. And if thy right eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee. For it is expedient for thee that one of thy members

should perish, rather than that thy whole body be cast into hell. And if thy right hand scandalize thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is expedient for thee that one of thy members should perish, rather than that thy whole body go into hell. And it hath been said, whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a bill of divorce. But I say to you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, excepting the cause of fornication, maketh her commit adultery: and he that shall marry her that is put away, committeth adultery."

After establishing the general principles concerning His relation to the Old Law, the Savior shows, by some concrete instances taken from the fifth and sixth commandment, what He means when He says that not a jot or tittle will pass, but that He is come to fulfill the Old Law. He points out the severe punishments which man is liable to suffer if he violates the Law even only by what are called smaller transgressions. He enumerates the most difficult sacrifices which man must be ready to make. His terrifying seriousness stops at nothing, not even in matters in which the Old Law granted a mitigation to human frailty.

Let us ask for the grace to conceive a deep horror of sin and a firm determination to avoid every, even the smallest, sin.

I. THE EXTENT OF THE LAW: A. IT REGULATES THOUGHTS AND DESIRES. "You have heard that it was said to them of old: Thou shalt not kill. And whosoever shall kill, shall be in danger of the judgment. But I say to you that whosoever is angry with his brother shall

be in danger of the judgment. And whosoever shall say to his brother Raca, shall be in danger of the council. And whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire," more exactly: "in danger of the fire of Gehenna." In order to understand the words of the Savior, we must premise that among the Jews of those days the administration of justice for ordinary crimes rested with the local courts. To these courts He refers when speaking of being "in danger of the judgment." The worst crimes, above all those committed against religion, were reserved to "the Council" or "Sanhedrin," which consisted of priests, Scribes, and possibly other influential men, and was presided over by the high priest. It would seem that only this court could pronounce sentence of death by the most painful modes of execution, such as burning alive.

The Hebrew word *"Nabal,"* which literally means "fool," among the Israelites was an expression of deep contempt, since it contained an accusation of the worst sin, namely the denial of God. For an Israelite this appellation was all the more opprobrious because it implied a breach of the sacred covenant made on Mount Sinai.

Gehenna is a ravine near Jerusalem, in which the Israelites at one time practiced the worst kind of idolatry, offering their own children to Moloch, in whose honor the poor victims were burned alive. Therefore, Gehenna for the Jews was the most unholy place in Palestine; in the days of the Savior offal was de-

posited and burned there. The place and its fires were a type of hell.

In the pericope which we are considering, Our Lord explains by instances taken from the fifth commandment that His law does not, like the Mosaic law, confine itself to external acts, but embraces also thoughts, desires, sentiments, in a word internal acts. The Decalogue forbade murder, maiming and similar external violations, and haled the transgressor into the courts of justice, but provided no penalties for thoughts of hatred, vindictive desires, and verbal insults. But the Christian law regulates the interior activity of man as well as his exterior conduct and comprises within its province all offences against charity, in particular all those which are apt to lead to homicide, as anger and injurious words. The Savior now tells His hearers that these too are forbidden by His law. He declares that in the Kingdom of God all the different kinds of offences against charity are not only matters of criminal justice, but will be punished with greater or less severity according to the degree of malice they contain. This He expresses by using comparisons taken from the different courts of justice and the different punishments provided for in the Mosaic legislation.

Jesus declares that "whosoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment," in other words, he contracts a guilt for which he will have to answer before the divine tribunal in a manner similar

to that which forces one who has committed actual murder, to appear before the local court of justice and be sentenced. The point He wishes to make is this: While the human law considers nobody guilty unless he has performed an external act which is forbidden, God holds us responsible also for thoughts and desires.

Christ, moreover, shows in the next examples that the Divine Judge takes into account also the degree of malice which lies in an act. For if the sinful anger which one harbors against his neighbor works itself out into expressions of uncharitableness and contempt, such as "Raca," which means "You despicable wretch," God considers this sin of greater moment, just as the Jewish law saw a greater criminality in misdeeds reserved to the forum of the "Council" than in those which it left to the competence of the local courts of justice. If the expression of contempt and ill-will rises to grossest abuse, as it does in the Hebrew word *"Nabal,"* which means "you perfidious atheist," the worst appellation an Israelite can think of, only the most painful and degrading punishment, that of being consumed by the flames of Gehenna, is a proper comparison for the guilt contracted before God. It is evident that in these words Christ does not refer to sins committed in excitement and without due deliberation, but only to such thoughts and words as contain a deliberate grievous malice.

*Application.* Christ could hardly express more emphatically than He does here, our duty to control our

thoughts and words, and the care with which we ought to avoid not only mortal, but also venial sins. The means which help us gradually to free ourselves from small offences are: Increase of hatred against sin by means of meditation and oft repeated resolutions to avoid every sin; removal or avoidance of the proximate occasions for venial sin; circumspection and self-possession. Let us examine the state of our soul with regard to venial sin and the way in which we make use of the means suggested for avoiding it.

B. STRINGENCY OF THE NEW LAW. "If therefore thou offer thy gift at the altar, and there thou remember that thy brother hath anything against thee; leave thy offering before the altar, and go first to be reconciled to thy brother: and then coming thou shalt offer thy gift. Be at agreement with thy adversary betimes, whilst thou art in the way with him; lest perhaps the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Amen I say to thee, thou shalt not go out from thence till thou repay the last farthing." The Lord again proposes a general truth by its application to a particular commandment and a particular phase of this commandment. The truth He stresses now is this: God does not accept any free service in place of a duty He imposes. He wants the submission of the heart and the will, therefore, first of all obedience to His laws; no work of supererogation can take the place of a duty or obtain from Him a dispensation from an obligation. As illustration the Savior takes the duty of making due amends for an offence given to

one's neighbor. He tells the offender that even if he has brought the preparations for a sacrifice in the temple so far as to have placed the offering before the altar, the sacred action is to be stopped and the priest kept waiting until the offender has made amends to his offended brother. Such a thing had been unheard of in Israel. But Christ adds very cogent reasons to this behest. The Divine Judge cannot be bribed by gifts. He is, indeed, long-suffering and waits patiently whilst man is "in the way with his adversary," living on earth with his fellow-man. During this time the offender can make amends to the offended. But as soon as he dies, his case comes before the Eternal Judge; from that moment no leniency, but strict justice rules, and the culprit must suffer the full penalty, "until thou repay the last farthing." No voluntary and free offering which the offender may make to God before making amends to his offended brother, is acceptable or able to take the place of the duty which he owes and which renders him liable to just punishments. In the example given by Christ the apology for an offence is a duty, whilst the offering of a sacrifice is a work of piety and not obligatory.

*Applications.* 1) The Savior here condemns an error frequently found among men, who falsely think that they can dispense themselves from a strict duty by works of supererogation. But man has no choice in such matters; he must either obey God or incur punishments. We certainly ought to advise sinners to give alms and perform

other good works; but these deeds as such do not save them. They only can obtain a stay of the punishment, prevent sudden death and prepare the soul for the grace of conversion. For us priests and religious the conclusion is that freely chosen works of supererogation cannot make up for what is obligatory. No act of piety, charity, or mortification can take the place of rule, or duty, or the regulations of Canon Law, or the orders of superiors.

2) If we have offended our neighbor, we must make amends. We are not in the right relation to God until this has been done. It is not always necessary formally to ask pardon; we can show our regret by a friendly remark, by a small service, by a sign of esteem or confidence. But the Lord tells us that due reparation must be made.

II. THE SACRIFICES DEMANDED BY THE NEW LAW. "You have heard that it was said to them of old: Thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say to you, that whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her in his heart. And if thy right eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee. For it is expedient for thee that one of thy members should perish, rather than that thy whole body be cast into hell. And if thy right hand scandalize thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is expedient for thee that one of thy members should perish, rather than that thy whole body go into hell." The Lord again takes a concrete example to illustrate His point. The Old Law forbade adultery, and here again concerned only external actions. Christ, on the contrary, wants to

tear out by its roots the very passion which endangers the purity of matrimony. According to Him he who yields to an inordinate passion only so far as to look lustfully on a woman not his wife, is just as guilty before God as an adulterer was guilty in the eyes of the Old Law.

Moreover, Christ instructs His hearers about the great sacrifices they must be ready to make in order to avoid sin. It is a very significant fact that, whenever He speaks of sin, He becomes serious to a degree which one would hardly expect in a man of His extraordinarily kind disposition. In His eyes sin is such a terrible evil that we must be perfectly willing to sacrifice not only all external goods, but even the most necessary limbs and members of the body, and sacrifice them too without a moment's hesitation, nay count this painful loss a real gain, if it should be necessary in order to escape sin and hell. The martyrs are literally placed before this necessity. But it can happen to anybody that a good as precious as his right eye and apparently as indispensable as his right hand will lead him into sin if it is not given up. In such a case he must not only let somebody else take it away from him, but personally deprive himself of it, even though this would be as painful as having his eye plucked out or his hand chopped off without the use of an anaesthetic, and even though it would be as horrible to his feelings as it would be to pluck out his own eye or personally to swing the axe which severs his right hand from his arm. Nor does the Savior permit him to consider himself a

loser who is to be pitied, but wants him to think himself a winner who is to be congratulated. He is to be glad of the great gain which lies in having escaped sin and hell, the flames of which would otherwise devour not only the eye and the hand, but the whole body. Words like these were never heard in the Old Testament; and yet, it is the kind, mild and gracious Savior who utters them. What, then, must sin be?

*Applications.* 1) Woe to the world, woe to the women who by their dress provoke that furtive look which the Savior here condemns in such strong terms. Woe to those who by pictures, statues, performances which they give or permit to be given, scandalize others. Let us not indulge in "liberal" notions in this matter.

2) Christ demands that we be ready to die rather than commit a sin. But then we must ask ourselves whether there is any sacrifice which we may refuse God. For though we are not allowed to pluck out our eye and cut off our right hand, we must be ready to suffer such pain as this mangling of our body would entail. Let us foster a very deep and lively conviction that sin alone is a real evil in this world. All this sounds terrible to the natural man; but we must not forget that God gives us His grace when those sacrifices have to be made, and that the reward promised in the beatitudes will certainly be ours.

III. THE SCOPE OF THE NEW LAW. "And it hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a bill of divorce. But I say to you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, excepting the cause of fornica-

tion, maketh her commit adultery: and he that shall marry her that is put away, committeth adultery." In these words the height of moral perfection which the New Law demands, is explained again by a practical instance. Christ intentionally takes a case in which the Old Law was rather lenient and the practice prevalent among the Jews still more so, namely, the indissolubility of matrimony. In the Old Testament God really permitted matrimony to be dissolved among the Jews "on account of their hardness of heart" (Matt. 19,8). As the author of matrimony and Lord of matrimonial rights and duties, He could grant this concession. For the purpose of preventing greater evils, above all of saving the lives of wives who had become displeasing to their husbands, He permitted a husband under certain conditions to divorce his wife, so that she could contract another valid and licit matrimonial alliance and that the former marriage was dissolved. However, in such a case the Old Law protected the woman as much as possible by prescribing that the husband give her "a bill of divorce." But this concession is now completely abolished by Christ.

He says that whosoever puts his wife away, drives her into adultery. This means, first, that the woman remains his wife, and, secondly, that the busband is responsible for all the sins into which she is driven by his step. For, not being able to support herself and to satisfy her natural desire in the only lawful way, forced, moreover, to depend on another man, she is

driven into sinful relations. Christ permits, but only in certain cases, not a severing of the marriage bond, but merely a separation from bed and board. But He adds that who ever marries a woman thus separated from her husband, is guilty of adultery, that, consequently, she is and will remain, "until death do them part," the wife of the husband from whom she is separated. Even conjugal infidelity does not justify a man in divorcing his wife. The Savior does not intend to give here His entire doctrine on the subject of the indissolubility of matrimony, but only one feature of it, namely, the restoration of marriage to the sanctity it enjoyed in Paradise, which entails the repeal of the "bill of divorce" granted in the Old Testament. The truth which He wishes to inculcate by the concrete example, or the new norm of His Kingdom which He applies here to the subject of marriage, is this: In the Kingdom of God man is to be restored to the dignity which was his in Paradise, when he came out of the hands of the Creator. He is again to exercise complete mastery over his passions, and matrimony, like every other factor of human life, is again to become a means for achieving holiness. As Christian marriage is not merely an institution for satisfying the demands of nature, but a source of noble virtues, so even the indifferent actions necessary in life, as eating, sleeping, recreation, are to be occasions for supernatural merit. Our vocational work, the social requirements, the dictates of etiquette, the amenities of life, politeness and

refinement, are one and all to serve the great aim of our existence, God's service. The New Law will give abundant grace for this purpose.

*Application.* Christ leaves no subterfuge to fallen nature, but wants us to surrender completely to the divine will. We may not bargain with God; for He cannot relinquish His supreme dominion over His creatures. This is a truth we must never forget. But at the same time we must bear in mind that this supreme dominion is our greatest blessing. God draws no benefit from it; all the profit He gives to us. It is, moreover, not an arbitrary will which imposes these restrictions and burdens, but the very nature of things. To go against the law of nature is like attempting to stare into the sun when it is brightest, or to swallow a deadly poison.

COLLOQUY. Acts of gratitude for the light Christ has given us, for all the blessings that have accrued to us through these doctrines of His. What would our life have been in the past without the salutary changes which His doctrines wrought in human society? Acts of sorrow for our sins; of resolution to avoid all sin; petition for grace to strengthen us, so that we may be victorious in the combat against our fallen nature. "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? The grace of God by Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom. 7,24.25).

## Meditation 11

### THE PERFECTION OF THE LAW

### (Matt. 5,33–48)

"Again you have heard that it was said to them of old, Thou shalt not forswear thyself: but thou shalt perform thy oaths to the Lord. But I say to you not to swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is the throne of God: nor by the earth, for it is his footstool: nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great king. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your speech be yea, yea: no, no: and that which is over and above these, is of evil. You have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you not to resist evil: but if one strike thee on thy right cheek, turn to him also the other: and if a man will contend with thee in judgment, and take away thy coat, let go thy cloak also unto him. And whosoever will force thee one mile, go with him [other] two. Give to him that asketh of thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not away. You have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thy enemy. But I say to you, Love your enemies: do good to them that hate you: and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you: That you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven, who maketh

his sun rise upon the good and bad, and raineth upon the just and the unjust. For if you love them that love you, what reward shall you have? do not even the publicans this? And if you salute your brethren only, what do you more? do not also the heathens this? Be you therefore perfect as also your heavenly Father is perfect."

In the preceding verses Christ has established the will of God as the supreme rule and norm of our thoughts, desires, words, and actions. Now He brings the Old Law to perfection in another regard, by proclaiming the precept which He will later on call His commandment, the precept of charity. He announces it, not in the general and abstract form, but in three practical applications: sincerity which makes every oath unnecessary; love, which "is not overcome by evil, but overcometh every evil by good" (Rom. 12,21); and kindness, which embraces all men, friend and foe, according to the divine exemplar.

Let us entreat the grace of perfect charity.

1. SINCERITY IN ALL WE SAY. "Again you have heard that it was said to them of old, thou shalt not forswear thyself: but thou shalt perform thy oaths to the Lord. But I say to you not to swear at all, neither by heaven, for it is the throne of God: nor by the earth, for it is his footstool: nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great king. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your speech be yea, yea: no, no: and that which is over and above these, is of evil." Among the

ancients the regard for sincerity, honesty, and fidelity was very small in theory and still smaller in practice. Even a limited acquaintance with ancient literature proves this only too glaringly. The admonitions to veracity in speech and honesty in dealing are, we might say, almost painfully numerous in the books of the Old Testament. Hence the sad necessity of the oath, by which the Divinity is either directly or indirectly taken to witness and the vengeance of Heaven is called down on the head of him who does not tell the truth or does not intend to keep his promise.

We just now said that an appeal to the omniscience, truthfulness, fidelity, and holiness of God can be made directly or indirectly. Directly it is done in the form of the oath now commonly in use, in which God is called upon in express words as the guarantor of truth and fidelity and the avenger of lies and dishonesty. But a justifiable fear and reverence can prevent one, as it were, from appearing before the All-Seeing and All-Knowing One directly and making Him an interested participator in a statement or promise. This fear led the men of antiquity, so to speak, to veil God's face and to swear by something which had only a clear connection with the Divine Majesty. Consequently, the Jews were accustomed to swear by the heavens or the earth, which are creatures of God and manifest His majesty; or by Jerusalem, the city of God; or by their head or their life, which were gifts of God, over which He had supreme dominion and the loss of which was a punishment incurred for a false oath. To this supreme domin-

ion Christ refers when He says: "Thou canst not make one hair black or white." As all these practices have a real meaning only if one thinks of Him who made heaven and earth, chose Jerusalem as the place of His habitation, and disposes of life and death, they as well as the direct and explicit appeal to the All-Knowing, All-Truthful, All-Holy God, when made under the proper conditions, are real acts of worship and tend to honor the Divine Majesty. But in as much as they are rendered necessary by the lack of conscientiousness, duplicity, greed and other evil passions of men, they are "of evil," the result of sin.

There are two other elements of imperfection and evil in the practice of oaths and sworn promises, if not always, at least on many occasions. Unless the object of the oath is something very sacred or important for the service of God, the act of calling Him to witness or making Him the guarantor of a promise draws Him into the squabbles of the world and into unimportant human affairs and forces Him to supplement the lack of human honesty and fidelity. Moreover, if a man can be relied upon only if the fear of divine punishment makes him do the right thing, he is grossly lacking in the spirit which ought to animate a child of God and render him like unto the Father in Heaven, who is all-truthful and animated by sincere charity towards all men. A man who will not do his duty by his own brother unless he is constrained by the fear of dire punishments, can have but little love for his brother.

Christ wants to repair all the harm sin has wrought in man and make perfect what is less good. Therefore, the Christian must consider God too exalted to be drawn into the squabbles of the world and to assume the guarantee or go security in dealings between man and man. This disposition of mind certainly manifests greater reverence than is shown by taking and keeping an oath in a matter of merely human interest. Moreover, the Savior wants to make the law of unselfishness apply also to our dealings with our fellowmen. If this is the basis of intercourse between men, the oath becomes unnecessary. If the Christian says: "Yea," it must be a sincere "Yea"; if "No," an honest and straightforward "No." "Whatever is over and above these, is of evil."

*Applications.* 1) If anybody, it is the apostle who must be thoroughly truthful and reliable, since his leading position and the confidence which he enjoys as adviser of the people, imperatively demand it. But for this great circumspection is necessary, lest he say something for which he will be sorry later on, or promise something which it will be imprudent or impossible to do. A talkative person is more apt to tell an untruth and a hasty person is likely to make a promise which cannot well be kept. Let us imitate the example of Jesus Christ, who, though knowing everything, when asked by the mother of the Zebedees "that whatsoever she would ask, he would do" (Matt. 20,20; Mark 10,35), and thus requested to bind Himself before He was told what she wanted, did not accede to the request, but first insisted on hearing what she desired of Him.

2) The apostle frequently is made the sharer of people's secrets and thus can be tempted to betray a confidence. Some people are shamelessly inquisitive, and their curiosity becomes rather aggressive when they notice that one has knowledge of something they do not know. The best policy would seem to be never to intimate that one knows something or knows more about a certain affair, and to turn inquisitive people off by a question or a remark which will silence them.

II. "CHARITY WHICH OVERCOMETH EVERY EVIL BY GOOD." Human limitations and human malice at times make everybody the victim of injustice and thus occasion serious temptations against charity. The Savior, in the verses which we shall now consider, explains what is a strict duty on such occasions, and what is purely a matter of advice and perfection.

A. A STRICT DUTY. "You have heard that it hath been said: An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you not to resist evil," (according to the Greek text: "not to make a counter-attack on the offender"). To arrive at the meaning of Christ's words, we must note first of all that the "law of retaliation," to which He refers, and which is found in the Mosaic code, did not permit the individual Israelite to take revenge for an injury inflicted on him, but only gave a direction to the public authorities in the administration of justice. The law of nature forbids vindictiveness and only permits the injured person to seek redress or protection, but not the satisfaction of hatred and the spirit of re-

venge. The judge in a secular court of justice has to consider only the concrete facts, not the motives which prompt the plaintiff to hale the offender into court. If he finds that the accusation is true, he must inflict the penalty fixed by law, no matter whether the accuser is actuated by a spirit of vindictiveness or by a proper consideration for his interests. The Jews, like many people nowadays, lost sight of these truths; they often acted from mere personal hatred when bringing an offender into court and often retaliated on their own private authority. The Mosaic code in accordance with its purpose and character could not legislate against this fault.

But Christ's Kingdom being spiritual, His code must cover this matter. Therefore, the Savior inculcates the obligation of the natural law by which man is forbidden to take personal revenge or to apply to the courts merely from a spirit of vindictiveness. Such is the meaning which both the Greek text and the best commentators attribute to our Savior's words: "But I say to you, not to make a counter-attack on the evil-doer." The Savior does not forbid His followers to appeal to the courts for protection or redress, but only to retaliate. This is a matter of strict duty.

*Application.* Not to be vindictive after an offence, but to forgive and not, as the common phrase is, "to pay an offender back in his own coin," is a rare virtue even among Christians—even among those who have an apostolic vocation. Vindictiveness is a very subtle passion, which finds

specious reasons and excuses in what is falsely styled common sense, the necessity of not casting oneself away, the imagined intention of preventing further offences or of maintaining the dignity of one's state or the claims of the Church, and whatever other pretexts wounded self-love is able to urge. Let us be on our guard against it.

B. THE CHRISTIAN SPIRIT. "But if one strike thee on thy right cheek, turn to him also the other. And if a man will contend with thee in judgment, and take away thy coat, let go thy cloak also unto him. And whosoever will force thee one mile, go with him two. Give to him that asketh of thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not away." In these words our Lord does not give a strict precept, as in the prohibition of rancor and vindictiveness, but a counsel of Christian perfection and a means for more easily complying with the precept just imposed. By four instances He describes a disposition of mind and heart which will enable us to bear even greater injustice than that which we must actually suffer. We are first of all to strive after a degree of humility, patience, equanimity and charity which will make us ready to bear an insult twice as great as the one to which we are subjected, or, as He says in His example, "to offer the other cheek too." To understand the second illustration, we must bear in mind that "the cloak" or woollen outer garment was for the Israelites in Palestine not only a more expensive article of dress than "the coat," a cotton or linen inner garment, but was indispensable for the poorer classes,

since they used it as a cover in sleep; hence, the Mosaic law prescribed that a cloak given in pawn had to be returned to its owner before nightfall (Ex. 22,26; Deut. 24,13). Now the Lord admonishes His audience that if one were to commence an unjust lawsuit against them for the purpose of depriving them of something as necessary as their inner garment, they should be *willing,* not only to give up this "coat" without defending their right in court, but even to deprive themselves of the more necessary "cloak," in order that thus they might avoid the uncharitableness which commonly arises from a lawsuit.

In the next instance the Douay version translates: "Whosoever will force thee a mile." The Latin Vulgate and the Greek text here employ a technical term which corresponds to our English "commandeering." In antiquity royal messengers and carriers (*"angaroi"*) had the right to take the horses of people and to force anybody to accompany them as guide or carry their load for them. Christ, therefore, tells His hearers that if one were to deprive them of their freedom of action or treat them like slaves, as the royal messengers did when they forced the people to do service for them or commandeered their horses, they ought to be humble, patient, and peaceable enough to do twice as much or to bear an insult twice as great, or, as the Lord says, walk two miles instead of one.

The meaning of the fourth illustration can be more clearly stated thus: "If one unjustly or insolently tries to extort a gift from you, or wants to borrow an article

which, as you know, he will never be able to return, or never intends to give back, do not turn your face away from him." The underlying idea seems to be that we ought to be willing to do good even to those who naturally provoke our resentment by their insolent and importunate demands or by making promises which they do not intend to keep.

*Applications.* 1) Though the Savior in these words does not voice a strict obligation, but merely invites men to the practice of Christian perfection, priests and religious can hardly neglect them without failing in their duty. For in order to save souls it will often enough be required of them to forego their rights, to accede to unfair demands, and to "offer the other cheek after being struck on the right." Sinners, pupils, and patients are apt to repay care and attention with insults and to "impose" on the good will of priests, teachers, and nurses. If they are refused or treated harshly, if the "blow on the other cheek" is not borne cheerfully by the priest, teacher, nursing Sister, they harden their hearts and stubbornly resist all further efforts. Insults, material losses, unjust treatment belong to the cross by which we must save men.

2) Our charity must be unselfish, not politic. Let us not expect a return for what we do for souls—not even gratitude. And if we meet with black ingratitude, let us beware of becoming misanthropes or cynics, and above all let us not slacken in our zeal for souls. If we were to lose our enthusiasm on account of such experiences, it would show that we did not work purely for God, but for more or less selfish motives.

III. CHARITY EMBRACES FRIEND AND FOE. "You have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thy enemy. But I say to you, Love your enemies: do good to them that hate you: and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you: that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven, who maketh his sun rise upon the good and bad, and raineth upon the just and the unjust. For if you love them that love you, what reward shall you have? Do not even the publicans this? And if you salute your brethren only, what do you more? Do not also the heathens this? Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect." The Old Testament, too, had a law of fraternal charity; but for reasons too long to explain here the Jews believed that it referred only to members of their nation and permitted them to "hate" foreigners, "Gentiles." This limitation of charity Christ now removes. National segregations, differences of color and creed do not exist for charity in the New Law. But this is not enough. The parting wall of personal enmity must also be broken down. "Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you." The Savior gives three reasons for this command. A child of the Heavenly Father must try to imitate that Father in sentiments and deeds. Seeing how the Father bestows His gifts, the cheering light of the sun and the prosperous rain, on all, just and unjust, saint and sinner, and realizing that all men are His beloved children, and either actually or at least by destination brothers of Christ, he may not withhold his

charity from anybody, not even from an adversary or an enemy. Moreover, to love only those who love us, as even the publicans, those farthest removed from the Kingdom of God, do, and to salute only our brethren after the custom of the heathens, is a kind of charity which does not need a Heaven-sent Messias and His graces, nor a divine adoption; the promptings of nature are sufficient for such narrowness. And finally, such charity is far below the exemplar set for the Christian. The type and last reason for all his thoughts, sentiments, words, and deeds is God. Hence, the Lord closes this portion of His sermon by saying that we must be perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect.

*Applications.* 1) To what heights does Christ's teaching rise in these lines! It is infinitely loftier than anything a mere human mind can invent and even than anything God has taught in the Old Testament. It surpasses mere human strength. However, we "have access now in one spirit to the Father" (Eph. 2,18). This Spirit is a spirit of strength, able to overcome our natural weakness. Therefore, frail though we be, we are able to obey this highest law of Christ not merely once or twice, but during an entire lifetime. And when we feel it difficult, let us look up to God, whom we love and for whose sake we are charitable, and let us ask the Holy Ghost, the Personal Love in the Godhead, to strengthen us.

2) Here we also have a means of assisting others who find it hard to forgive and forget. Grant to them that it is hard; tell them that they are not expected to rise to

this heroism by their own unassisted strength. But lead them to God; persuade them to make acts of charity and to ask for the grace required for this hard task. Tell them to fly to their loving Savior and declare their love for Him without thinking of the offender. Such acts will quiet the excited mind and soften the heart. They will feel again as children of God and receive back from Him what they have lost by the offence of their neighbor. When the feeling of chagrin and of having been degraded by the offence they have suffered, has thus been soothed, they will be better able to forgive.

COLLOQUY. Offer to Christ all the contradictions, calumnies, humiliations which He may permit to befall you. Petition Him for the grace of that world-embracing charity which considers all earthly things of no value and is ready to be sacrificed for God in the service of men. "I have run the way of thy commandments, when thou didst enlarge my heart" (Ps. 118, 32).

## Meditation 12

### CHRISTIAN PIETY

### (Matt. 6,1–6; 16–18)

"Take heed that you do not your justice before men, to be seen by them: otherwise you shall have no reward of your Father who is in heaven. Therefore when thou dost an alms-deed, sound not the trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. Amen I say to you, they have received their reward. But when thou dost alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doth; that thy alms may be in secret [remain unseen]: and thy Father who seeth in secret [who witnesses without being seen] will repay thee. And when ye pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites, that love to stand and pray in the synagogues and corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men: Amen I say to you, they have received their reward. And when you fast, be not as the hypocrites, sad [Greek text: do not put on a morose, surly face]. For they disfigure their faces [Greek text: they make faces horrible to look at], that they may appear unto men to fast. Amen I say to you, they have received their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head and wash thy face; that thou appear not to men to fast, but to thy Father who is in secret [remains invisible]: and thy Father who seeth in secret, will repay thee."

In the preceding passage Christ has told His hearers that they must not be satisfied with the letter of the Law of Moses, but practice a virtue which is much higher and has a wider application than that of the Scribes and Pharisees. He now shows that their religious spirit, or what we commonly designate by the name of "piety," must be far superior to that of the leaders of Israel. He begins with three practices of piety which are obligations of the natural law and for this reason may not be neglected in any true religious system. They are prayer, alms-deeds, and fasting. Since the devil, according to the old proverb, always "builds a chapel next to the place where God erects a church," a very common danger to all true virtue consists in its being deflected and misused in the service of human passions. But these three practices of religion are more liable than others to degenerate into ostentation and to be distorted into means for the gratification of pride and vanity. Therefore, Christ gives a general warning not to practice virtue for the sake of gaining human praise and winning the admiration of men, and then applies it to those three kinds of virtuous actions.

We omit in this meditation Christ's instruction on prayer which is inserted here and culminates in the "Our Father." As this passage is very important and deserves a more lengthy consideration, we shall devote a special meditation to it.

Let us ask for the grace of never practicing virtue for the purpose of winning praise and the esteem of men,

but of having always the right intention in the practices of our holy religion.

I. NO PRIDE IN THE PRACTICE OF VIRTUE. "Take heed that you do not your justice before men, to be seen by them: otherwise you shall not have a reward from your Father who is in heaven." By "justice" Christ understands here as elsewhere the works of virtue, the works which are in accordance with God's law, and are, therefore, due to God. He is very emphatic in His warning; "Take heed." The next words, "that you do not your justice before men to be seen by them," must be taken together. Since the Lord in the sequel inculcates the duty of doing justice before men in order that they may be able from the good works of His disciples to find out where the true Kingdom of God is, He cannot mean here that all virtue should be practiced secretly. The Greek term translated by "to be seen" would better be given in some such way as this: "to be looked at with admiration." There is great disorder in practicing virtue for the purpose of winning the praise and admiration of men; for it is making a pretense of doing something for the honor of God, from love of virtue or for the sake of charity, while in reality one seeks only one's own honor and loves only oneself. This is contemptible hypocrisy. And what honor is sought? As an ancient commentator remarks: "What is the praise of men but the noise which a few puffs of wind produce? When men stop speaking, the reward is gone."

The Savior directs our attention also to another mo-

tive: "Otherwise you shall not have a reward of your Father who is in heaven." How could the God of truth reward hypocrisy? It is not without significance that Christ does not speak of a reward from "God," but from "your Father." What dutiful son will not try to please his father rather than any one else?

*Applications.* 1) It will happen that thoughts of vanity come to us when performing acts of virtue which can be noticed by others. Such ideas are to be despised, but ought not to prevent the good deed. With St. Bernard we will tell the tempter: "I did not begin for your sake, nor shall I desist on your account." Thoughts of self-flattery may also arise and will have to be treated in the same manner. If we wish to do more, let us frequently renew our good intention and make these suggestions a reminder to offer the good work again and again to the "Father in Heaven."

2) Even when our good works become known and we receive credit for them, Christ's law still holds, and we must be animated by the spirit of St. Paul: "To me it is a very small thing to be judged by you or by a man's day [the courtday of the human tribunal], but neither do I judge myself, but he that judgeth me is the Lord" (1 Cor. 4,3.4).

II. PURE INTENTION IN ACTS OF CHARITY. "Therefore when thou dost an almsdeed, sound not a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. Amen I say to you, they have received their reward. But

when thou dost alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doth; that thy alms be in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret will repay thee." By the very fact that the Lord does not speak about the necessity of giving alms, but immediately discusses the right and the wrong manner of doing it, He lets us know that He considers the obligation of helping the poor self-evident. It is, as said before, a precept of the natural law, written into the human heart. His words about not sounding a trumpet do not imply that the Pharisees were guilty of literally doing so. No indication of such a practice can be found, and it was, moreover, impossible in the synagogues. The great majority of interpreters explain the expression as a metaphor, because such a use of the phrase was not unusual. Alms were collected in the synagogues every Sabbath and distributed to the poor in the evening of the same day. They were deposited in boxes which had the shape of a trumpet, and which enabled the "hypocrites" to make a noisy display; hence it is probable that Jesus alludes to this kind of "trumpeting."

Christ calls men who do this, "hypocrites." For the vainglorious alms-giver pretends to act from motives of piety and charity; he wishes to be admired as an unselfish person; and yet he is the very contrary. In this opprobrious appellation the Savior gives us the first motive for avoiding this vice. He adds a second by saying: "Amen I say to you, they have received their reward." The Greek text is more telling than our version of it: "Verily, I assure you, they have already their

full pay," i. e., may expect nothing more. Their full pay is "that little puff of wind," of which the interpreter quoted before speaks, and then "they are out of their money and have nothing to show for it."

But since Christ's spiritual direction is never merely negative, but always also constructive, He not only tells His audience what they must avoid in this matter, but also what they ought to do. They ought to deal out their charity in so secret and unobtrusive a manner that if their left hand had eyes and the alms were given by the right, the left hand would not notice what the right is doing. This means more than merely refraining from doing it in an ostentatious manner. For if even one who is as near to us as the left hand is to the right, is to be kept ignorant of our charitable deeds, special efforts must be made to secure secrecy.

Interpreters go farther in their explanation and say that, since the left hand, being part of the giver, is in a way identified with him, the Lord wants us not even to think for ourselves that we are doing something great. After all, alms-deeds are a strict duty which goes with the possession of the goods of this earth as a mortgage goes with the object mortgaged. Now we have no reason to flatter ourselves because we pay off a mortgage. Moreover, God has a larger share in all the good actions of ours than we ourselves; for to speak in the terms of the theologians, He produces them "as the primary cause," whereas we co-operate with Him only as "secondary causes." Our part may be compared to the part which a little child, as yet unable to write, takes

in composing a letter to his absent father, when his tiny hand is guided by the mother.

The last and most important motive Christ proposes when He continues to say: "And thy Father who seeth in secret [who, though invisible, notices what thou art doing] will repay thee." God considers Himself our debtor and will settle the account in terms which befit the liberality and dignity of His Infinite Majesty. The reward, moreover, is as certain as the payment of a debt by an honest debtor.

*Applications.* 1) In the light of the Savior's words we understand why the Saints were so careful to insure secrecy for their kind deeds and made so little of them. It was not self-stultification nor a forced, unnatural blindness to the goodness of their actions. Here we have a lesson that even more perfect persons are apt to neglect. Naturally we all wish the recipient of our charity or kind service to appreciate the kindness and to give credit to the donor; we are all too prone to make ourselves known as benefactors. There may, at times, be good reasons for letting the recipient understand to whom he owes the kindness; but these motives must never be drawn from selfishness, from a refined aspiration of pride or a consideration of our own temporal profit. For otherwise the word of our Savior would apply to us: "They have already been paid in full," *i. e.,* in the form of human praise, or popularity, or affection, and there remains only a debt before God, the debt of vanity or selfishness, and the consciousness of having been a hypocrite.

2) Do the words of Christ not imply a caution for us regarding the manner in which we are to solicit donations for our churches, institutions, undertakings, and regarding the manner in which we are to acknowledge these gifts and recompense the donors? Will He sanction appeals to their vanity and modes of acknowledgment which foster pride? Let us fear to deprive the donors of their true and proper reward and let us not place them in the class of those of whom Christ says so emphatically, "They have been given their pay." Let us hesitate to push them into purgatory for their good deeds.

III. THE PROPER MANNER OF PRIVATE PIETY. "And when ye pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites that love to stand and pray in the synagogues and corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men: Amen I say to you, they have received their reward. But thou, when thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret: and thy Father, who seeth in secret, will repay thee." The second fault of the "hypocrites" is the use they make of prayer for the purpose of gaining the esteem of men. The pious Israelites used to pray three times a day, at the hour of the morning, noon, and evening sacrifices, according to the words of the Psalmist, who said: "Evening and morning and noon I will stand and declare: and he [God] shall hear my voice" (Ps. 54,18). Those who were not in Jerusalem united themselves with the sacred rite by praying at nine, twelve, and three o'clock. Those who lived in Jerusalem and could

not assist in person at the sacrifice, would turn in the direction of the Temple while reciting their prayers; those outside the Holy City would turn in the direction of Jerusalem. However, these times for prayer were not prescribed by God; yet Pharisaical formalism made a strict duty of them and even demanded that the prayers be recited at the given time no matter where one chanced to be. The "hypocrites" made it a point to be at those hours in places where they would be seen by many, in the synagogues or at the busy corners of the streets. As those prayers were by no means short, everybody had to notice the "pious" men. The standing position which they assumed during their prayers was not in itself unusual, but rather very common in those days, perhaps even more common than kneeling, though the latter was also customary.

Christ, therefore, does not wish to insinuate that the Pharisees committed a sin of pride by standing during their prayers, nor does He condemn public prayers. Common and public worship of God is a duty of the natural law, which He cannot and will not abolish, but rather enables us to perform in the most perfect manner possible by the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The guilt of the Pharisees consisted in praying publicly for the purpose of being admired as devout men. Prayer by its very nature is a worship of God; but they turned it into a worship of their own persons. It was a grave disorder that for the sake of obtaining some glory, which they deserved least of all men, they did not hesitate to abuse the highest and noblest acts a creature can

perform. It was disgusting vanity intentionally to take a position at the corners of the narrow streets of Oriental cities, where the traffic was greatest and every passer-by had to stumble over the sanctimonious devotee mumbling his psalms and possibly staring at the clouds or fixing his eyes on his toes. Hypocrites they were also in pretending to be absorbed in their devotions whilst they thought of the admiration simple and ignorant folk might possibly feel for a few moments. The Lord throughout the entire Gospel manifests the most perfect refinement in speech and manners and is very sparing of opprobrious epithets; but here He employs a very strong one, three times in succession.

He repeats here too, with the same emphasis as before: "Amen I say to you, they have received their reward." Then, true to His custom of never being merely negative in His directions for men's spiritual life, He goes on to show how we are to perform our private devotions. That He is speaking of private devotions follows from the fact that He has reference only to the three private prayers customary among the Jews.

He becomes very personal by using the form of the second person singular, addressing every one of his hearers individually, as it were, telling him to retire to His private room, shut the door, and pray in secret. In doing so, He follows the form of speech favored by the Orientals, who like to convey their ideas by metaphors. He wants to make it clear to His hearers that ostentatious piety must be avoided, and glory and esteem must not be sought by appearing as one who

loves to pray and is devoutly recollected when speaking to God, and that only the honor of the Divine Majesty and help from Heaven must be intended.

He adds the promise, "And thy Father who seeth in secret will repay thee," thus reminding us that, though unseen by men, the devout petitioner is seen by "the Father." So well pleased is the "Father" with one who humbly separates himself from the busy world and seeks an audience with His Divine Majesty, that He considers Himself indebted, as it were, to that man. Interpreters call special attention to the words: "Thy Father will repay thee," using the Greek term which expresses meeting a debt. Too many of the mighty ones of earth are annoyed if they are frequently importuned by petitioners, and make the latter realize that it is mere undeserved liberality on their part if they listen to requests. Only the most charitable of men will always listen with benevolence; and the number of those who feel as becoming debtors by the fact that they are appealed to for help, is very small indeed, as St. Chrysostom remarks. God "feels" like one of these charitable benefactors and wants to be approached as the petitioner's father. We are to be convinced that He will listen with the benevolence of a kind and prudent parent and "pay His debt," i. e., reward, with royal munificence.

*Applications.* 1) The fact that Christ simply presupposes the necessity of private prayer when expounding the basic obligations of His Kingdom, is very significant. The daily

prayers of the Israelites were, as said before, far from being short aspirations. Let us bear constantly in mind that the first and most important duty of the priest and the religious is prayer. Therefore, we must devote our best efforts to it, choose a suitable time, and never treat it as though it were a mere accessory and work were the essential duty. Consequently, it would be wrong habitually to relegate the recitation of the divine office and other obligatory prayers to the late hours of the evening. Important is also the place in which we recite our private prayers. The Lord, who tells His hearers that they retire to the privacy of their chamber and bolt the door, will assuredly not be pleased if, without a good reason, we choose a place for our devotions which bears a close resemblance to a busy street-corner.

2) In external behavior true piety avoids everything singular and theatrical. But certain forms of exterior reverence customary in all religious communities, even though not practiced by people in the world, are praiseworthy and ought to be reverenced as precious heirlooms. To observe them also after the years of training are over, or when obedience sends us into a house in which they are neglected, is no singularity. The same holds good of practices that are time-honored in a parish, but perhaps do not suit the taste of the younger generation, who are tainted with a preference for the coldness of Protestant worship. The true pastor of souls will not discourage those who adhere to those venerable relics of the ages of faith, but, on the contrary, prudently promote their use both in church and in the homes. They have a deep significance and are based upon the truth that man must honor God not only with his soul, but also with his body. To fold

the hands whilst praying is a means to foster the spirit of reverence and has been chosen to express the truth that sinful man deserves to be treated like a prisoner, whose hand are bound. To approach the holy table with downcast eyes and folded hands, to genuflect before the Blessed Sacrament, to strike one's breast, are customs sanctified by the regulations of the Church and must not be permitted to go out of use. Thus common prayer in the family circle, the use of Holy Water in the houses, the pious practices formerly observed in families during Advent and Lent, ought to be encouraged as much as possible.

IV. PROPER MANNER OF FASTING. "And when you fast, be not as the hypocrites, sad. For they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Amen I say to you, they have received their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not to men to fast, but to thy Father who is in secret; and thy Father who seeth in secret, will repay thee." As a third illustration of the purity of intention required in the performance of good works Our Lord chooses fasting. In the law of Moses only one fast-day was prescribed for each year, "the day of expiation"; fasting on other days was, however, one of the religious acts often recommended in the Old Testament and suggested as an object of vows. It was practised chiefly in times of public and private affliction. The Pharisees fasted twice each week, on Mondays and Thursdays. The "hypocrites" made a great display of their penitential abstinence. The Greek

text here is much more emphatic than our English version. The Lord says that they "become sour-faced," "look stern and dull," an expression for which the word "sad" is hardly an equivalent. Christ goes even more into detail in the next verse, which we may translate thus: "They put on faces too ugly to look at," or "they give their faces an unnatural pallor." These deluded men used to powder their face with ashes in order to seem to suffer more distress and to feel a good deal weaker than was really the case. The Lord not merely warns against this disorder, but again gives positive directions. One is to keep the fact of doing penance from others, appearing as usual, not omitting the ordinary care of cleanliness, which among the Orientals includes not only washing one's face, but anointing one's head. The "hypocrites" go around unwashed and unkempt, and even bedaub their faces. Many commentators take the expression "anointing one's head" as a metaphor denoting the manifestation of unusual gladness. But we may justly question whether Christ, in His great love for truth and honesty and in His common-sense asceticism, would ever want us to practice a deception. Let us adopt the view expressed by Fr. Coleridge in his volume, "The Sermon on the Mount" (page 46): "It may, however, be thought most probable that our Lord is here not enjoining any positive deception by the affectation of a special and unusual state of rejoicing, but rather that He is recommending that we should simply show no outward signs of self-affliction. The injunction may mean nothing more than

that the ordinary signs of cheerfulness are not to be omitted when we fast, but that we are to let our outward garb and demeanor be as usual."

The reward of this humility is again: "Thy Father who seeth in secret will repay thee."

*Applications.* 1) In these three illustrations we learn some important characteristics of our Lord's asceticism. The first is its logical consistency and reasonableness. The directions He gives are but applications of the fundamental principle of all religious life, namely, that man was made solely for God and that all creatures are but means enabling him to serve and love his Creator. Secondly, He wants men to serve God from love and with the affection of children for their father. This is but a logical conclusion derived from the fact that, through Redemption, we have become children of "the Father." He addresses every one of His hearers individually by using the form of the second person singular: "Do it for thy Father, who though not seen, watches thee constantly and is pleased by thy good intention and thy good work." Thirdly, Christ bases His asceticism on the realization of the divine presence; we are to pray, perform charitable deeds, practice penance, in the sight of the Father. We must also admire the thoroughness of His asceticism. The sole aim of all Christian asceticism worth the name is to render man entirely subject to God, and this end can be reached only by destroying selfishness in the fire of divine love. Lastly, we notice how much Christ abominates exaggeration and pompousness, notoriety and singularity, all of which in their last analysis are merely pride and vanity. He is the decided enemy of all advertising, glare, and

showiness. "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation" (Luke 17,20), i. e., with "éclat," pomp, noise, blaring trumpets and glaring torches. This principle, solemnly proclaimed by the son of God Himself, holds good not only for the Church in general, but for the Kingdom of God in individual souls, in parishes and communities. Theatrical devotions, celebrations not sanctioned by the liturgical regulations, may rouse an empty enthusiasm, but will not engender solid piety. What counts, is not the crowds who come to witness a show, but the people who come to pray.

2) Notice also the telling manner in which the Lord gives His instructions. No long sermon with an exhaustive treatise on humility, purity of intention, modesty, could produce a better effect than the few words of Christ. They are so simple that a child can understand them, and yet so fraught with suggestions that a deep and mature mind can find food in them for long meditations. They do not stop short at the understanding, but go right to the heart and the will, creating a deep aversion against pride and hypocrisy and calling forth serious resolutions to practice humility, simplicity, purity of intention, love of God.

3) We may ask ourselves why Christ, the kindest of men, who is never given to raillery, does not hesitate to voice such a scorching condemnation of that class of men which enjoys the highest esteem in the whole country. It is not the natural aversion of a right-minded man against sham nor the indignation called forth by the sinfulness of hypocrisy. Christ abominates sins in accordance with their gravity, and undoubtedly there were sins in vogue among

the Israelites which in themselves were more grievous than Pharisaical hypocrisy. The chief reason would seem to be that this vice sapped the religious life of the nation and was one of the main causes which frustrated God's benevolent intentions with regard to Israel. Pharisaical hypocrisy everywhere is second to none of the causes producing the spiritual ruin of society. There is only one class of persons for whom the Savior has nothing but severe censure—namely, the men and women who ought to be leaders and guides in the spiritual and religious life, but give scandal and thus cause the spiritual ruin of those who look up to them. God grant that we, who are looked up to as priests, educators, superiors, may never become "hypocrites." What a terrible fate would be ours if, on meeting the Savior personally for the first time at the moment when we are to be judged by Him, He would hurl at us this appellation of "hypocrite"!

Colloquy. Pray for the grace of dying more and more to the world and self, and of serving God in sincerity and childlike simplicity. "Mind the things that are above, not the things that are upon earth; for you are dead and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3,2.3).

## Meditation 13

### THE SPIRIT OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD

(Matt. 6,7–9[a])

"And when you are praying, speak not much, as the heathens. For they think that in their much speaking they may be heard. Be not you therefore like to them; for your Father knoweth what is needful to you, before you ask him. Thus therefore shall you pray: Our Father who art in heaven. . . ."

Not only must mere earthly considerations and worldly motives not govern the life of the members of the Kingdom of God, but the spirit of the Old Law, the spirit of servitude, may not prevail among them. They must be animated by the spirit of the children of God in their entire life, but above all in dealing directly with the Father in Heaven. Hence, Christ, in teaching men how to pray, does not merely intend to show them what they may ask for, but above all in what spirit they should ask. This would seem to be the principal purpose of the beautiful instruction which He gives on prayer. The spirit of the child of God includes not only filial sentiments towards the Father in Heaven, but brotherly sentiments towards the other members of

His great family on earth. These latter sentiments, too, must pervade the work and the prayer of Christ's followers.

Let us ask for the grace to be thoroughly imbued with this filial and fraternal spirit in our whole life as well as in our prayers.

1. THE FILIAL SPIRIT. A. "And when you are praying, speak not much, as the heathens. For they think that in their much speaking they may be heard. Be not you therefore like to them; for your Father knoweth what is needful for you, before you ask him." In the Greek text the words are more telling: "When you are praying, do not prate [do not babble] as the heathens; for they imagine that their verbosity will secure a hearing for them." The student of ancient mythology can not fail to notice how the pagans represent their deities as haughty, imperious, capricious men and women. The kindness of those "celestials" is an unfounded partiality towards some human beings, mixed with a frivolous, almost diabolical hatred against others. They are so subject to moods that a poor mortal never knows what spirit animates them at any given moment. Therefore, rhetoric, base flattery and sycophancy must always form an ingredient of prayers addressed to them. Moreover, that servility which is a general and disagreeable trait of all paganism, whether ancient or modern, enters largely also into the mode of praying. Finally, the pagans deny omniscience to their gods; hence they deem it necessary not only to inform them of their needs and

wishes, but by a long exposition give them a complete knowledge of the favor desired and the reasons why the petition should be granted.

The Israelite knew indeed that Yahweh is omniscient and kind; but his religion made him not a child, but a bondsman of God, and his knowledge of divine things, being rather imperfect, retained some pagan elements. Religious servility is an ugly trait which only the Christian dispensation could eradicate from the hearts of men.

Altogether different is the attitude of the Christian towards God. Since sanctifying grace and membership in the Kingdom of Heaven make him a child of God the Father, his relation to the Divine Majesty is moulded after that which exists between a kind father and a dutiful son. Such a father and such a son can very well commune together even for a long time without prating. The son seeks the presence of his father not only when he is in need or desires a favor, or when he has received a gift, but converses with him also on other topics. He will never indulge in babbling sycophancy or flights of impassioned rhetoric.

*Applications.* 1) In the few words of the Savior quoted above we may find the real reason why prayer at times is rather hard for us. We try to make an impression on God by pompous oratory, we prate and babble, and thus disgust Him so that He remains silent and does not enter into conversation with us by striking what we might call a responsive chord in our heart or by making us feel His nearness and the acceptability of our words. Our affecta-

tion may be the result of some secret pride in our virtue or in the lofty ideas and beautiful phrases to which we give utterance. Let us be simple. What son tries in conversing with his father to indulge in oratory or the witticisms of the fashionable salon? It has been truly said that one simple thought is sufficient for carrying on a conversation with God.

2) Christ advises a really surprising brevity in the prayer of petition, yet inculcates the necessity of frequent and long prayers, calling them a communing with "the Father." Thus He effectively refutes the false notion that long prayers are proper only for neurotic women or people having a false conception of God, and that prayer consists, if not entirely, at least chiefly, in petitioning with occasional short acts of thanksgiving for favors received. Do only neurotic girls and sons in need speak to their father, and is the subject of their conversation restricted to begging and thanking?

B. "Your Father knoweth what is needful for you before you ask him." The Christian does not have to inform the Father in Heaven about his needs and wishes; why then must he ask God? St. Thomas gives the reasons. We must ask God for His gifts, first of all, in order to remove the obstacles which may exist in our heart against the divine favors. Among the principal impediments must be reckoned that self-sufficiency and pride which prompt us to rely too much on our own unassisted power or on an imagined worthiness, which, we feel, ought to compel God to give us what we desire. Another obstacle is want of appreciation of the

divine gifts; for man naturally makes light of gifts which he receives constantly without having to go through the trouble of asking for them. Moreover, God must guard us against being buried altogether in mere earthly desires, which would be a natural consequence of His constantly granting unsolicited what our nature needs or what is proper for it. Nothing is more dangerous for a soul than a constant natural prosperity for which it does not have to pray.

*Application.* It is, therefore, not necessary to propose many reasons to God when we ask for His gifts. Christ inculcates brevity, "because your Father knoweth what is needful for you." What makes our petitions really efficacious? Four elements: the goodness of God, the merits of Christ, our own helplessness and indigence, and our humility. The simple statement of its need is as a rule the only plea a child addresses to his father. When made with modesty and confidence, it is one of the best ways of honoring a parent. The important point in the prayer of petition is that we must be able to say in all sincerity that our request is reasonable, that we are really convinced of our unworthiness, and beg humbly. There are very few humble beggars; most of them think they deserve a good deal more than they ask for.

II. BROTHERLY SPIRIT. "Thus therefore shall you pray: Our Father . . ." To the first requirement for a proper attitude towards God, in the general tenor of our life and particularly in our prayers, Christ adds a second, viz.: brotherly spirit. Every one is to consider God not merely as "his" Father, but as "our" Father,

the Father of all who were redeemed by Christ. Sanctifying grace makes us not only children of God, but brothers of Christ and of all other men who, like us, have been elevated to the supernatural order. Supernatural brotherhood is inseparably connected with supernatural adoption. Therefore, the necessary supplement of the filial spirit is the fraternal spirit, which makes us realize that we are not alone in our dealings with God, but act as members of a great family. We must have a heart for the weal and woe of our fellow-men in every land, above all for the weal and woe of the Church and our brothers in the faith. We are to intercede for the whole world, above all for those who need God's help most and ask for it least or not at all, for the pagans, heretics, schismatics, and unbelievers, the dying, the severely tempted, and the sorely afflicted, for those for whom nobody prays. And as we feel a brotherly concern for the weal and woe of God's family, so we draw inspiration and confidence from the fact that in our prayers we are able to rely not only on the merits of Jesus Christ, but on the holiness of the Church and the virtue of our brethren.

*Application.* Let us beware of being narrow-minded, but foster in our souls the sentiments of St. Paul, of whom it is said: *"Cor Pauli, cor mundi,"* Paul's heart is as wide as the world.

III. THE ADDRESS. "Our Father who art in heaven." St. Augustine remarks that the Israelites were never

told to address God as their Father. Although Yahweh at times is called "Father" in the Psalms or other prayers of the Old Testament, we do not find a single prayer which begins with this word. The Christian, however, is told positively by Christ Himself to begin His prayer by calling God "Father."

Our English version and the Latin Vulgate continue: "Who art in heaven." Some interpreters of note prefer to omit the relative construction and translate: "Our heavenly Father" or "Our Father in the high heavens." The purport of these words is not to create the impression that we must send our prayer to a Being far away from us; for God is everywhere, in and around us, nearer to us than the air and the light in which we dwell. Their first and most natural purpose is to express and acknowledge the dignity and majesty of God. The second object would seem to be to remind us of our destiny and our true home in Heaven, where we shall enjoy the full benefit of being God's children.

But who is here addressed as "Father?" The commentators do not agree on this point. Some think that it is only the First Person of the Trinity, while others, supported by the Fathers of the Church, say that it is all Three Divine Persons as the One God. This latter explanation seems to be the better one. For we pray to *God* and are called the children of *God,* not the adopted children of the Father; but *God* is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The Father of a child is he who makes the latter participate in his nature; but we participate in the divine nature by sanctifying grace, and

sanctifying grace is produced by all three Divine Persons. Moreover, the Church in some of her approved prayers calls Christ "Father." He is indeed also called "the first born among many brethren," but this appellation belongs to Him in as far as He is man, not in as far as He is God.

*Application.* To realize the full import of this address it is profitable to meditate on the numerous reasons for which, and the many ways in which, God shows Himself as our Father in the highest heavens; on the great dignity of being His children; on the duties which follow from this relation between Him and us. These meditations, as all meditations on the Our Father, prove a valuable help when we find ourselves unable to meditate on the matter prepared; they can also be used with great fruit before and after Holy Communion.

COLLOQUY. Thank Christ for the instruction He has given you. Resolve to understand and practice better the spirit which He here inculcates. Ask for the sentiments of a true child of the Heavenly Father.

## Meditation 14

### WHAT MAY WE PRAY FOR?

(Matt. 6,9b–15)

"Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our supersubstantial bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation. But deliver us from evil. For if you will forgive men their offences, your heavenly Father will forgive you also your offences. But if you will not forgive men, neither will your Father forgive you your offences."

In the seven petitions of the "Our Father," Christ teaches us, first, what we should ask from God and, secondly, what importance is to be attributed to the blessings for which we pray. Most important are those gifts which directly concern the honor of the Divine Majesty and which form the object of the three first petitions; less important are the blessings which directly concern our well-being and for which we beg in the four remaining ones. As we cannot obtain pardon for our sins unless we forgive those who have offended us, Jesus adds a weighty consideration to this petition.

Let us entreat the grace to understand the lesson the Savior here inculcates.

I. THE FIRST PETITION. "Hallowed be thy name." The first three petitions of the Our Father concern what we may call the personal interests of God and the final end of all creation. The first petition would not be explained correctly were we to say that it expresses the wish that the name of God be always used with reverence. St. Chrysostom tells us that the verb "to hallow" has the meaning of "to honor, to glorify." The word "name" in Hebrew is employed to designate the nature, dignity, and power of a person. Thus God, when warning the Israelites to obey the angel He sent them as a guide through the desert, gave as reason that "my name is in him," meaning that the angel had divine authority and power. When David said that he conquered his enemies "in the name of the Lord," he wished to express that he had gained the victory by the power of the Lord.

Consequently, the meaning of the first petition is that God may send copious graces to us and to the world, "our brethren," so that He—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost—be loved and served, that Their majesty and Their wonderful attributes become better and more widely known, that faith, hope, and charity be increased in the world, that many more, or rather all men may attain to the knowledge of the true faith and honor the Divine Majesty, and that those who have the gift of the faith honor God more.

Whilst this, in the first instance, is a petition, it at the same time serves as a stimulus for him who prays, not only to honor, love, and serve God better, but to promote the divine glory in other men. For, as the interpreters remark, we do not say, "Hallowed be thy name *by me*," but quite generally: "Hallowed be thy name."

*Application.* For a correct understanding of the significance of the "Our Father" we must always bear in mind that Christ in this instruction does not want to bind us to a definite set of words and an iron-clad formula, but to teach us the spirit, the manner, and the qualities of a good prayer. This we see from the various prayers which we find Him making in the gospels and from the example of the Apostles. The first petition of the Our Father, therefore, tells us that the object of our first and greatest desire must be to increase God's glory. For not only is this glory the highest and ultimate end of all divine works, but the noblest and most necessary aim of a true child of God. Would that we fully understood what a great work we do by promoting the greater glory of God in ourselves and others! It is the only recompense we can make to the good Father in Heaven. It does not consist in fulsome speeches, but in loving esteem, heartfelt gratitude, willing service. This is the glory which gives a real pleasure to God. Conceived thus, the desire for the greater glory of His Divine Majesty can become a holy obsession and a stimulus for heroic actions.

II. THE SECOND PETITION. "Thy Kingdom come." The readers of this work need no lengthy explanation of what is meant by the Kingdom of God. It is that

happy condition in which the individual rational creature is lovingly submissive to God and all individuals are organized into a society with the God-Man as their Head and King, from whom streams of graces go out to the individuals and to the society as such. This is the first object of the petition; but it includes a second, the destruction of the empire of Satan. As St. Cyprian says, we entreat also the grace that this empire be more and more destroyed in our souls, that we may never desert or betray the Kingdom of God, and that those who are not members of God's Kingdom, may throw off the yoke of Satan and become followers of Christ.

The reasons for this petition are obvious. To establish and increase this Kingdom is the principal means for securing the glory of God. It is, moreover, the end and aim of the Incarnation and Christ's work on earth. Again, we can not obtain anything more salutary for ourselves and more beneficial for the world than a firmer and more thorough establishment of this Kingdom. We have but to look around us to see how much is still needed to establish it, even in our next neighborhood, in our own country, in which perhaps millions know practically nothing of Christ and His Church, and very little of God. And are there not many, even among our co-religionists, who do yeoman's work under the banner of Satan? And what about the millions of pagans, infidels, schismatics in foreign lands?

But how can our weak prayers bring down such graces on the world? They do so, not in virtue of their

intrinsic merit; their efficacy comes from the merits of Christ, the kindness of God, our weakness and the need of the world, from elements all of which are great. Their efficacy comes also from the command of the Savior. Thus we can see how the proper petition for the members of the Apostleship of Prayer in League with the Sacred Heart is: "Thy Kingdom come."

*Application.* The second petition, like the first, is at once a prayer and an exhortation. The service of God often seems uninviting and hard because we look at it from the dark side, the view-point of the earthly man, who sees in it but the loss of pleasures and temporal advantages and believes that only the earth can give him what is really desirable. And yet, the satisfaction which the Kingdom of God procures is "the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding" (Phil. 4,7). Experience alone can give a proper conception of the joy which lies in promoting the Kingdom of God in one's own soul and in the souls of others.

III. THE THIRD PETITION. "Thy will be done as in heaven so on earth." The will of God has many functions; we shall here consider only the two which concern this petition and are called by the theologians *directive* and *decretive*. As *directive* the divine will guides the free wills of rational creatures by imposing commands and obligations, as, for instance, the ten commandments and the duties of one's state of life, also by expressing wishes and giving counsels without binding by a strict obligation, as, for instance, by in-

viting to the state of perfection, urging to works of supererogation, etc.

As *decretive* it governs the entire world and individual men, distributing graces and rewards, inflicting punishments and corrections. These acts are called "divine decrees," as, for instance, the decree of the Incarnation, the election of Israel as the people of God, the determination of the time for the end of the world, the sentence passed on the last day on the just and the sinners. These decrees are either conditioned and, humanly speaking, subject to change, or final and irrevocable. We may call many of the former God's first intentions, the latter, His second intentions. Thus the destination of Adam and Eve in Paradise, for themselves and for their posterity, was a conditioned decree and God's first intention; the punishment to which they and all mankind became subject after the Fall, was an absolute decree and His second intention. The offer of a vocation to the priesthood or religious state is a conditioned decree and a first intention, the bestowal of fewer graces when the call is not heeded, is the result of an absolute decree and God's second intention. The decree to create the world is both absolute and a first intention.

For the execution of which of these wills of God do we pray in "Our Father"? First of all, we beg that we and all men may obey the *directive* will of God, or, in other words, that we may faithfully comply with the precepts and wishes of God. As far as His *decretive* will is concerned, we cannot reasonably ask that His

absolute decrees be fulfilled; this would be superfluous, to say the least. But we do pray that all His first intentions be carried out; for they one and all are for the greater glory of His Divine Majesty and the benefit of His creatures. God calls all rational beings into life for the purpose of taking them into Heaven. It would be wrong to say that He creates them for the purpose of either giving them the beatific vision if they obey His law, or punishing them if they disobey Him. The decrees concerning punishments, whether they be withdrawals of grace or the condemnation to purgatory and hell, are second intentions and presuppose a wilful fault on the part of the creature. Therefore, to sum up, we ask God in this petition to bestow copious graces on us and the whole of mankind, to enable all to do what is pleasing to Him and always so to act that He does not have to change His mind, withhold graces, and inflict punishments on account of our sins.

This petition is most honorable to God and most salutary for the world; for all God's plans and first intentions are dictated by infinite wisdom and love and best suited both to our eternal welfare and our peace and contentment on earth. It is by no means a useless request; for God frequently acts like a kind-hearted man, who when he for good reasons has resolved to withhold a benefit first intended, because the recipient for whom it was destined, has proved himself unworthy of it, nevertheless is prevailed upon to revoke this decision, because either the prospective beneficiary or somebody else pleads with him. How often do we meet

with the prayer that God withdraw not His mercy from Israel in spite of its crimes! In the New Testament we can make a petition of this kind with infinitely greater confidence, because we can offer a much better plea than the virtues of Abraham, Moses or David, namely the merits of God's Own Son.

Therefore, the third petition is by no means merely an act of humble resignation, the meaning which we combine with it when we accept a cross and express our humble but passive agreement with what God does. It is first and foremost a resolution and a petition not for silent resignation, but for cheerful, vigorous action.

However, the Savior teaches us to pray not merely that we and all men do God's holy will, but that we do it as perfectly as the Angels and Saints carry it out in Heaven. Those blessed spirits understand the wisdom and kindness of every wish of God; they see how well He is pleased with their obedience, and in their great love for the infinitely amiable God they cannot but comply with His wishes. Moreover, in Heaven God never has to change His intentions through any fault or remissness of the Blessed; and this happy condition increases their joy.

*Application.* Here we learn from our Savior Himself how important it is for our spiritual life frequently to ask for the grace of always doing the will of God perfectly, lovingly, eagerly and to keep ourselves in constant readiness for this. This disposition is a precious grace; it en-

ables us to make rapid progress and it secures great peace. By it we are brought nearer to God and consider our being His servants our greatest happiness.

IV. FOURTH PETITION. "Give us this day our supersubstantial bread." The Greek word here rendered by "supersubstantial" both in the Vulgate and the Douay version occurs also in the abbreviated form of the "Our Father" given by St. Luke, but there both versions translate it by "daily." It can have both meanings. However, the best interpreters among the early Fathers, and the Church herself in the Mass and the office, constantly choose the word "daily." This would seem to settle the question.

In this petition we pray for our daily sustenance, i. e. for what we need from day to day to support our bodily life; the term "bread" is often used in Sacred Scripture to designate the food we need. Our Lord adds qualifications in the words "this day," "our" and "daily." By calling it *"our"* bread, He emphasizes the truth that the food is destined for us by Divine Providence and necessary for our life. By calling it *"daily"* bread He reminds us of two truths, that though we need a daily sustenance to comply with our duties, nevertheless God wishes us to ask for it, and, secondly, that we should pray only for the necessities of life, not for luxuries. With regard to the first of these truths it is important to remember that God wishes to be asked even for what is required for our corporal and spiritual life, just as wise parents insist on their children

requesting them for what they need, and as many employers expect their employees to ask when needing new material. The reason in all these cases is that what is given without asking is neither properly appreciated nor properly used. And as to luxuries, though they are also God's gifts, it is better to leave their bestowal to His wisdom and not to ask for them, lest we become too much attached to them and lose our good intention.

In instructing us to petition for the necessaries of life "to-day," Christ does not want us to feel as if it would be wrong to ask for more than is required to keep us alive for just one day; but He intends to teach us modesty in our demands, and to inculcate the truth that our dependence on God in all things is comparable to the condition of beggars who lack what is required to sustain life even for a single day. Does not experience tell us that famines and shortages of food occur in spite of the fertility of the soil and all the advantages of modern civilization? At the same time Christ instructs us to trust always in Divine Providence and to leave the care for the future to Him. This is the spirit of the children of God. As a child living in the house of kind parents does not ask for provisions six months ahead, nor trust in his own powers, so we are bidden to discard futile worry about the future and proud reliance on ourselves; for both are fatal to the spirit demanded of the children of God.

We pray God to give daily bread not only to us, but to all mankind. Nothing binds men more closely together than the care which one takes of the bodily

needs of the other. Thus the fourth petition is a wonderful bond uniting all who are redeemed by Christ. Those who are unable to give material alms to the poor, here find a good substitute for helping them. For the rich, who harden their hearts against their indigent brethren, this petition is a crushing condemnation; and in the mouth of those who defraud the laborer of his just wage, it turns into blasphemy. The former by reciting it tell God to leave them their superfluities and take the care for the needy upon Himself; the latter say to Him: "I deprive my employees of the food you have prepared for them by enabling them to work for me and enabling me to profit by their labor; feed them Yourself in some other way."

*Applications.* 1) Will it be wrong to conclude from these words of Christ that the abject poverty which has come into the world since the Protestant Reformation, among other causes is due also to a wide-spread neglect of prayer? Is it not necessary for priests and teachers to speak more frequently about the pious Christian practice of saying grace before and after meals?

2) Besides the applications suggesting themselves spontaneously by what has been said above, we may also ask ourselves with what devotion we say grace before and after meals and whether we recommend the poor and needy to God's care.

V. THE FIFTH PETITION. "And forgive us our debts, as also we forgive our debtors." The four last peti-

tions follow not the order of dignity of the favors requested, but the order of their nature and our weakness. We must be able to live before we can receive remission of our sins and freedom from dangerous temptations and other evils.

The translation of the fifth petition commonly used by English-speaking Catholics differs from the Latin form only in words, not in meaning; but the Greek text reads: "As we also *have forgiven* our debtors." That the Lord has reference to our sins and the sins of the whole world, is clear from the abbreviated form in St. Luke: "Forgive us our *sins.*" Each day Christ makes us pray repeatedly that our sins may be forgiven. He wants to keep us constantly aware of our sinfulness and firmly grounded in the spirit of humility. He also wants all men to realize that by their own unassisted efforts they can do nothing for which they can claim the pardon of their sins. God is not bound to accept the satisfactions of Christ for adults if they do not humbly and contritely entreat this favor.

But while this truth is apt to humble us, nevertheless the exhortation of the Savior to entreat the divine pardon in such few words, to entreat it again and again despite our constant relapses, must fill us with confidence. It is, however, of the utmost importance that He tells us to advance a reason for being heard, namely, "as we also *have forgiven* our debtors." One who asks for the remission of his sins, must have banished all wilful aversion and spite against those who have offended him, before he may dare to plead for mercy

for himself. These words, which we are told to add to our plea, express at the same time a reason and a norm for the divine pardon. In the mouth of a person who has not forgiven his offenders they become a curse, drawing down the divine anger; for he asks the Divine Judge to treat him precisely as he treats his own "debtors."

Commentators call our attention to a very consoling truth. Who would not wish to have some assurance that his sins are forgiven? We can easily obtain it; we have only to ask ourselves whether we have really forgiven those who have offended us, and harbor no wilful thoughts of revenge and aversion against them.

*Applications.* 1) Would not this frequent pleading for pardon seem a useless and even offensive formality? But here we are in the realm of the infinite holiness and justice of God and the great moral weakness of man; in this sphere only the teaching of Christ can guide us safely. Moreover, we beg forgiveness not only for ourselves, but for the world—that world in which so many sins are committed and so many sinners are not sorry for their offences. The plea for pardon in behalf of unrepentant sinners contains a powerful petition for the graces which they need to render themselves fit to be forgiven.

2) Christ's words inculcate also the necessity of making frequent acts of contrition and doing penance for our sins. While their guilt may have been forgiven long ago, the burden of temporal punishment may still rest on us. We ought not to harbor any misgivings about our sins

not having been pardoned, but it will be profitable not to feel too sure that all the temporal punishments due to them have been canceled. Thus the fifth petition becomes an impressive warning not to neglect the purgative way, but to remove the debt of temporal punishments by indulgences and other good works.

VI. THE SIXTH PETITION. "And lead us not into temptation." The expression, "to lead into temptation," is a Hebraism occurring frequently in the Old Testament, by which a person is said to do or to effect when he merely permits or does not prevent. Hence in the sixth petition we ask God not to permit us to be assailed by temptations. It is evident that Christ does not want us to pray for complete immunity from temptations; for this would contradict His teaching about temptations. He has reference to certain kinds of assaults made by the devil, our own concupiscence, and the world,—assaults likely to harm us and therefore called "temptations" by pre-eminence. Such are the suggestions, allurements and intimidations which, on account of our light-mindedness, faint-heartedness, and want of self-control are particularly dangerous. God is not obliged to spare us these temptations, because it is our own fault if we yield to them. The fall in many cases has been prepared by a certain habitual negligence and a dangerous lack of generosity in God's service. As this petition shows, humble and oft-repeated prayer can secure for us the inestimable favor of being spared those situations in which we would fall. The Church prays for it on many occasions, for instance, on the

first Sunday in Advent, the fourth Sunday after Epiphany, the seventh, twelfth, fourteenth and nineteenth Sundays after Pentecost. It belongs to the gift of final perseverance, which, according to the Council of Trent, cannot be merited, but only obtained by humble supplication.

*Application.* Let us not slur over this petition; for it means very much to us. In it the Lord teaches us to make it our practice to ask God for protection from dangerous temptations and for the gift of final perseverance or, in other words, for the grace of never becoming untrue to our vocation. But, conscious of our moral weakness, we must not recklessly expose ourselves to occasions of sin; otherwise we cannot recite these words of the Our Father with a good conscience.

VII. THE SEVENTH PETITION. "But deliver us from evil." The translation suggested by some, "Deliver us from the evil one [i. e. the devil]," cannot be accepted for two reasons. In Sacred Scripture the Greek word here used for "evil," with one sole exception justified by the context, never designates the devil or an evil person, but always a physically or morally harmful thing; and the word used for "deliver" is never employed to express deliverance from persons, but only from adverse things. The best translation would be: "Deliver us from all that is evil." The commentators tell us that Christ means all moral evils and those physical evils which cause moral losses, as sin, dangerous despondency, moral recklessness, and those kinds

of sickness, persecution, trials, physical losses, which imperil the soul.

*Applications.* 1) How very much is asked for in this petition and what great confidence is expressed in making the entreaty with so few words! Confidence in God's willingness to hear us, in His wisdom and power. We leave the entire decision about the evils from which He is to spare us, to the Father in Heaven, and protest that we shall be satisfied with His decision. It is the petition which a beloved child addresses to the kindest, wisest, and most powerful of fathers.

2) Taking a comprehensive view of the seven petitions, we find seven classes of favors, which, though different from one another, nevertheless possess one common and very distinctive characteristic, namely, that they have a reference to our last end—the glory of God and our salvation. This quality is an indispensable condition for every good prayer. For God is bound by His holiness to will and do everything in the right manner and proper order. What has no reference to the last end, may not and must not be made the subject of our prayer; for God dare not listen to it.

VIII. EXPLANATION ADDED. "For if you will forgive men their offences, your heavenly Father will forgive you also your offences. But if you will not forgive men, neither will your Father forgive you your offences." Christ evidently is not satisfied with having insisted on the necessity of forgiving our offenders in the words of the prayer itself, but inculcates it once more with

all possible emphasis. He uses both the affirmative and negative form to make us realize this fact. Very often forgiving means no more than putting a favorable construction on an apparent slight or injustice, convincing oneself that no offence was intended and, therefore, no offence ought to be taken, even though the action, considered in itself, be offensive; we must realize that everybody has his limitations.

The Savior gives us three weighty motives for this task, one of man's hardest duties: our need of the divine pardon, our being members of God's family, and a comparison between the pardon God grants us and that which we must give. As to the first point, Christ holds out all hope for being forgiven by God to him who forgives his neighbor, but takes even the slightest hope for pardon away from him who does not forgive his neighbor. In this He goes a considerable step farther than in the "Our Father." For whilst with this prayer alone before his mind a subtle casuist, by omitting to say: "as we also forgive our debtors," might still find a loophole for refusing to forgive an injury, Jesus now declares in unmistakable terms that, for a man who refuses to forgive, all hope of a happy eternity is out of the question. On the other hand, to forgive offences is one of the best means for obtaining the disposition of heart which is required for God's pardon. Such is Christ's emphatic assertion.

The Savior also insists very strongly on our being members of God's family by twice in brief succession declaring God to be our Father. The privilege of being

a child of God is worth infinitely more than all the injury we may have suffered from men. Union and mutual love among God's children is vastly more important than the satisfaction of vindictiveness. Divine interests here clash with small human concerns and, therefore, must be given the precedence.

Finally, we are to compare what God does when He pardons our sins with what we do when we forgive our enemies. We have to deal with a man, one equal to us in nature and supernatural dignity, one subject to the same frailties as we, one who after all is not guilty of a greater offence against us than we often enough commit against our neighbor. This equality Christ wants to call to our mind when He says: "If you will not forgive *men,*" instead of: "If you will not forgive *your enemies.*" God, on the other hand, must forgive beings who are infinitely below Him, beings whom he never injures, but always treats with greatest consideration. We are told to pardon offences, not for man's sake, but for God's sake. We ought to be glad that we can make some return for the mercy we receive from Him.

*Applications.* 1) Here we see the extent of the restoration which Christ is come to effect in the havoc wrought by sin. Sin has not only severed the bond which united men to God, but caused discord and strife among the children of the same parents. Jesus will and must heal this double breach. Consequently, those who foster animosity and create opposition and aversion between men

are traitors to the cause of the Savior and help to undo His work. If we cannot effect a reconciliation between persons who bear ill will towards each other, at least let us be careful not to confirm them in their state of mind. And above all, let us never be guilty of "sowing discord among brethren."

2) We see here again how serious and uncompromising the Lord is wherever selfishness comes into question. An unforgiving spirit is a form of gross selfishness, which He will not tolerate. He is lenient in demanding austerities, but knows no concessions where interior mortification is concerned. God demands our whole heart; but He gives us the right to make any request, and make it in the briefest possible form, yet with full trust in the divine munificence.

COLLOQUY. Petition for the spirit of the children of God. "Our Father who art in Heaven."

## Meditation 15

### THE WHOLE MAN

### (Matt. 6,19–24)

"Lay not up to yourselves treasures on earth: where the rust and the moth consume, and where thieves break through, and steal. But lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven: where neither the rust nor the moth doth consume, and where thieves do not break through and steal. For where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also. The light of thy body is thy eye. If thy eye be single, thy whole body shall be lightsome. But if thy eye be evil, thy whole body shall be darksome. If then the light that is in thee, be darkness: the darkness itself, how great shall it be? No man can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one, and love the other; or he will sustain the one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

The key-note of this pericope is found in the words: "You cannot serve God and mammon." The members of Christ's Kingdom must belong entirely to God and, therefore, combat not only pride, as Christ explained in the preceding verses, but sensuality or the inordinate desire for the goods and pleasures of earth. The Savior now instructs us with regard to our attitude towards

the things of this world, and shows how we ought to strive after the temporal blessings which we need in his life.

Let us entreat the grace of not being deceived by the glamour of earthly riches, but be filled with the right kind of hatred of the idols of the world.

I. TWO KINDS OF TREASURES. A. FALSE TREASURES. "Lay not up to yourselves treasures on earth: where the rust and the moth consume, and where thieves break through, and steal." Man, in order to be able to live on earth, must not only satisfy the corporal needs of the present, but have an eye to the future. He is urged by his very nature to store up means for the necessities that surely will, or probably may, arise later on. The member of God's Kingdom is no more exempt from this natural urge than from the general necessity of providing means for sustaining his bodily life. The perishable goods of earth appeal also to him and are apt to cause in him that passionate craving to which the members of the kingdom of this world fall victims. Jesus, therefore, must free him from this temptation. He does so by showing him in three comparisons the proper motives for combating this wrong desire.

The Oriental world of Christ's day did not know modern economic conditions. People invested the results of their labors and enterprises largely in expensive trinkets, costly vessels, precious stones, and large stores of provisions, all of which they could easily

convert into money. To "lay up" as much as possible of these "treasures on earth," was the great aim of "the children of the world" in those days, and in different forms it is the chosen life-work of their followers throughout the ages. Jesus shows that they all labor with a great loss. For even if the objects for which they work so hard, did possess real worth, their value would mean nothing for them unless they could retain and use them in security. This security is made up by the durability or indestructibility of the articles and by the facility with which they can be protected against the greed and malice of other men. Christ now proves in a very convincing manner how little security there is in the possession of earthly treasures. A small moth can over night destroy the value of the most precious robe and a few drops of moisture, by causing rust, can ruin the most expensive vessel. Many interpreters, however, justly say that the Greek word translated in our version by "rust," means "decomposition, mould, mustiness," and for this reason refer it to stores of provisions, which the people in our Lord's time could not preserve as effectively as we with our modern methods. Finally, thieves can easily sneak into the house, break open the cases containing the precious jewelry and the boxes in which the costly garments are kept, and in a moment carry off what it has taken years to gather and endless care to hoard and keep. Thus there is but little security in the possession of wealth, whether it consists in precious garments, large stores of grain, or expensive jewelry. And last, though not least, even

if a man succeeds in protecting his earthly wealth against losses of this kind, death, that arch-thief, will surely make him a beggar; for his possessions are only "treasures on earth."

The wealthy man of to-day is not much better off; for though he enjoys greater safety against loss in the forms mentioned by Christ, accidents, errors in speculation, competition, the dishonesty prevalent in modern business, panics, depressions, wars, and all the other evils of modern economics can over night render him a pauper, and, besides, death has not lost its power.

*Application.* Our vocation makes it impossible as a rule to strive after great riches. But Christ's words are applicable to everything earthly, honor, influence, comfort, in short to everything we must leave behind when death carries us off. Positions and occupations, places and dignities have value only as means for attaining eternal salvation. Theoretically, we are convinced of this truth. Let us ask the Savior to give us courage and will-power to act accordingly at all times.

B. TRUE TREASURES. "But lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven; where neither rust nor moth doth consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also." After the Savior in the preceding verse has broken the infatuation for the perishable treasures of this world, He turns the minds and hearts of His hearers towards the true riches, which will last forever and are perfectly secure. He understands the human heart and

knows that mere contempt of wordly treasures is apt to lead into the aberrations of the Cynic philosophers. Man cannot help desiring riches of some kind. Therefore, Christ encourages him to strive after the greatest and safest treasures, those of Heaven, virtues and supernatural merits, and with them the possession of God Himself, who is the Infinite Good. Whatever he acquires in this line, is absolutely safe; for it is in the keeping of the Almighty, of "the Father." No untoward occurrence, no thief can rob man of them. He alone can deprive himself of them by sin.

To this motive Jesus adds a still more powerful one. His hearers want to be dutiful children of God and give Him their whole heart. The thought of the reward awaiting them in the other world is a powerful help to this; for "where thy treasure is, there is also thy heart."

*Application.* A vivid conception of the value of eternal things is at once a grace of God and the fruit of personal efforts to make them a tangible reality. Since it is a grace, we must pray for it; and since it is also the result of our own endeavors, we should often meditate on them and guard our heart even from becoming attached to small objects. For it is all the same whether the heart is captivated by the millions of the plutocrat or the pennies of the beggar; in either case it does not belong to God. A "rich" priest is offensive not only to God in Heaven, but likewise to men on earth. And yet a priest is considered "rich" when, after thirty or forty years in the ministry, his bank-account equals that of a merchant after a few months of work. A religious who is not very conscientious

in observing the vow of poverty, also belongs to the "rich," of whom the Lord says that they have already received their reward. The Church in this country is rather poor; let us see to it that this remains always a blessing, not only for her, but also for each one of her children.

II. DIVIDED AIM. "The light of thy body is thy eye. If thy eye be single [sound], thy whole body shall be lightsome [nimble and sure in its movements]. But if thy eye shall be evil [diseased], thy whole body shall be darksome [hampered in its movements]. If then the light that is in thee, be darkness; the darkness itself how great shall it be." The treasures of this world are not only valueless in comparison with those of Heaven, but so opposed to them that it is impossible to strive after both as objects independent of each other. This truth the Savior illustrates by the comparison of the eye. Here we come to a point which will not so easily be granted and, therefore, needs careful consideration.

He says: "The light of thy body is thy eye." Our eye must guide our whole body in all its movements. "If thy eye be single [sound], thy whole body shall be lightsome [free and certain in all its movements, capable of performing its work properly]." A healthy eye gives a single, clear picture of the objects before it and localizes them properly. Thus man is enabled to find his bearings and his way in the material world with all the thousands of objects surrounding him. He can direct his steps with security, can grasp and take what

he desires, and remove or avoid what is dangerous. 'But if thy eye be evil [blind or diseased], thy whole body shall be darksome," without proper direction, uncertain in all its movements. The diseased eye either has no vision at all or perceives objects but faintly, sees things double or confused, is mistaken in their proportions. It causes man to stumble and fall, overturn things, make faulty movements, hurt himself, become bewildered. "If then the light that is in thee be darkness" [if thy eye is unable to do its work, if, instead of directing, it confuses thee and makes thee more helpless than if thou wert merely groping in the dark] "the darkness itself, how great shall it be," i. e., great will be the confusion and the ensuing mistakes. A man in such a plight no longer knows whither to turn, makes one mistake after another, and finally comes to a dead stop, if nothing worse.

What is the meaning of this parable? What the corporal eye is for the body, "practical reason" or correct judgment is for the whole man. It directs all his desires, aims, and activities. What then must be the condition of a person whose reason, instead of being clear and sound in matters concerning his soul, cannot see the things of time and eternity as they really are? That man is either totally blind in matters spiritual or suffers from defective and wrong notions. In the first case he has no idea of the truths which ought to guide him, and thus sooner or later comes to great grief. For in religious and moral matters nobody can remain merely inactive; his nature and the creatures around

him force him to take sides. Man must have some object in life, and that object is either God and Heaven or self and the world. In the second case, if he suffers from defective sight, his moral perceptions are partly inadequate, partly faulty. Acting upon them he will make wrong moves, go in the wrong direction, stumble and fall, not perceive the danger which lies before him, imagine perils where there are none, flee from what he should strive after, run towards what he should by all means avoid.

Therefore, man's eye must be sound, "simple," not see things double. It is not simple if, instead of making the pursuit of earthly treasures a mere means to reach his eternal destiny, he sees in them objects of the same, if not of greater, importance, than his salvation and the treasures of Heaven. Such a person may at first let the affairs of his soul be a kind of control for his pursuit of earth's blessings. But gradually he becomes afraid to take a square look at things; the light of eternity becomes too strong for him; he no longer wants to find out what faith and reason have to say about his mode of life. He begins to live in a self-chosen and continually increasing spiritual dusk. Then empty shadows appear to him as mighty giants and gruesome phantoms, causing paroxysms of fright. Fantastic figures of imagined pleasures and treasures present themselves and are taken for realities. Finally, he may lose sight of eternity altogether, and then the word of the Savior becomes true: "If then the light that is in thee be darkness, the darkness itself, how great shall it be."

*Applications.* 1) Let us thank God for having taken us out of the realm of shadows and deceptions and enabled us to live in the bright light of Christ's truth. Let us do our part to bring as many as possible out of the darkness. We must convince them of the hollowness and sham of the world they love so much. One of the best means for this is to help spreading the movement for closed retreats of lay persons.

2) While we do not habitually live in that realm of unrealities which is the sphere of the worldly-minded, we, too, at times are enshrouded in darkness. We call such states periods of temptation and desolation. Though at such times we feel a positive disgust for the light of Christ, we must not close our eyes against it, but keep our gaze fixed upon it and follow it, firmly convinced that otherwise we shall fall and be even more miserable than in the present trial.

3) As the corporal eye must be accustomed to the light of the sun lest it be blinded by it, so our spiritual eye must be adapted to the supernatural light of Christ. He who habitually looks only at the lurid light of worldly wisdom and but rarely views things in the bright light of eternal truth, either is totally unable to understand the justice and correctness of the principles of faith or is molested and saddened by the conclusions he has to draw from them. Only the consistent application of the eternal verities in making our choices and resolutions can give us real peace and joy.

III. TWO KINDS OF SERVICE. "No man can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one, and love the

other: or he will sustain the one, and despise the other. You can not serve God and mammon." Perhaps we can explain the Hebraism of the second sentence best by stating that in Hebrew the expression "to hate" often means to give less attention, less service, while "to love" means to show greater attention. The commentators commonly give another explanation by saying that the servant who has two masters in time becomes so exasperated by the conflicting orders of the two that he conceives an aversion for one and does not mind him any more, whilst he "sustains," i. e., is attentive and obedient to, the other. We must bear in mind that practically the only servants in antiquity were slaves, in other words persons who were forced to do anything and everything they were ordered to do, no matter what. It is evident that nobody could be the slave of two masters.

God and the world, or God and Satan, both demand constant service, not merely an occasional attendance. Moreover, they are are opposed to each other in every point. Both make their demands in such a way that mere non-compliance with even only one order of theirs is an act of hostility. Finally, since one always forbids what the other commands, every compliance with the will of one is an attack on the other. Neutrality is thus impossible; one must really love one and hate the other.

Christ says, moreover, that we cannot serve both God and mammon. The exact translation of the latter word is not certain, but it is clear that it refers to

earthly treasures. St. Augustine calls attention to the fact that He does not say: "You cannot serve God and at the same time become rich," but: "You cannot be the slaves of God and mammon." One who is the slave of riches, attributes to the amassing of wealth the same importance which a servant of God attaches to the fulfilment of the divine will.

*Applications.* 1) Let us become more and more convinced that there is no alternative except to be either totally for God or totally against Him. Christ's words leave no room for doubt. The idea of a total surrender to God and a total breach with the world has something appalling only for him who does not realize the goodness and power of God. Though it may sound like the death-knell to peace and happiness on earth, in reality it is only the death-knell to misery. For the world and Satan care not a whit for our happiness. The world merely wants our service for its own selfish ends; the devil positively intends to make us unhappy for time and eternity. If he grants some pleasure to his slaves, he does so only for the purpose of making the chains of servitude stronger and tighter. Moreover, neither of them is faithful to his promises. The world discards a man when he can do nothing for it any more; the devil is the father of lies. Finally, they do not possess the power to grant what they promise, above all are they unable to still the yearning of the human heart, which is made for God. Though we live in a state in which we have renounced the things of the world, we must renew and deepen these convictions. They made a profound impression on us

when we chose our vocation. Let us get a still more profound insight into them.

2) We all are apt at times to put off God's livery and do the world and the devil a favor. Who can say that he makes no occasional concessions to an evil passion? Is there perhaps a pleasure or an occupation which threatens to interfere with the loyal service of God? If so, we must apply the warning of Christ: "You cannot serve two masters."

COLLOQUY. Acts of sorrow for infidelity shown in God's service; of gratitude for having been called to a state of life in which it is comparatively easy to serve God; cheerful surrender of oneself to God's service; petition for grace to be always a servant, a slave of God. "O Lord, I am thy servant, and the son of thy hand-maid. Thou hast broken my bonds: I will sacrifice to thee the sacrifice of praise, and I will call upon the name of the Lord" (Ps. 115,16.17).

## Meditation 16

### IN GOD'S HANDS

(Matt. 6,25–34).

"Therefore I say to you, be not solicitous for your life, what you shall eat, nor for your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than the meat: and the body more than the raiment? Behold the birds of the air, for they neither sow, nor do they reap, nor gather into barns: and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not you of much more value than they? And which of you by taking thought, can add to his stature one cubit? And for raiment why are you solicitous? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they labor not, neither do they spin. But I say to you, that not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed as one of these. And if the grass of the field, which is to-day and to-morrow is cast into the oven, God doth so clothe: how much more you, O ye of little faith. Be not solicitous therefore, saying, What shall we eat: or what shall we drink, or wherewith shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the heathens seek. For your Father knoweth that you have need of all these things. Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all these things shall be added unto you. Be not therefore solicitous for to-morrow: for the morrow will be solicitous for itself. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof."

If man devotes himself entirely to the service of God, as the Savior demands, he may and must trust that the Father in Heaven will provide for his material needs. For God, who has bestowed the greater gifts of life, body and soul, will not refuse the smaller ones of food and raiment. He who gives so lavishly even to plants which men consider useless, will not neglect His children. To worry about temporal needs is pagan. Our one task on earth is to do the divine will; God will provide everything else.

Let us entreat the grace of thoroughly understanding the lesson Christ gives us in this passage, so that we may learn to leave ourselves and all our concerns to God's paternal care, do not burden ourselves with a cross which is of our own making, and strive only to fulfill our God-given task.

I. GOD'S CONSTANT CARE FOR US. "Therefore I say to you, be not solicitous for your life, what you shall eat, nor for your body, what you shall put on. Is not the life more than the meat; and the body more than the raiment?" The Savior has just told His hearers not to seek the perishable treasures of the earth, but heavenly riches. But do they not need at least some measure of earthly goods? Moreover, as Pope Leo XIII says in his Encyclical on "The Condition of Workers," God, by endowing man with reason and subjecting him to needs the supply of which demands foresight, wants him to provide for the future. Hence Christ cannot mean that we should lead a shiftless life.

The commentators call attention to the fact that He does not say: "Do not work and have no thought of the future," but: "Be not solicitous." Throughout this entire passage He uses this word, which signifies a disturbed mind, and depicts the engrossing anxiety about future needs. The manner in which the Greek text gives the questions: "What shall we eat? What shall we put on?" by its grammatical construction expresses a perplexity and helplessness which our English version does not intimate. The Savior advances four reasons why we should keep our mind free from this extravagant anxiety, all derived from the fact that we have a Father in Heaven.

He first of all considers the gifts which this Father has already bestowed and is constantly granting to us, namely life and a body wonderfully organized and endowed with a spiritual soul. How many years have we enjoyed these blessings already? How wonderful are the construction and the functions of our organs, quickened and controlled by a spirit created in the divine likeness. Call to mind also the course of your life, the kind care of parents, teachers and custodians, the marvelous interaction of events and circumstances. Does not all this prove that you are in the care of One who is at once most powerful, wise, and kind? Will He, who lavished these invaluable blessings on you, now be so niggardly as to refuse you a morsel of food and a few yards of cloth, provided you do your share? And must not your excessive anxiety about these trifles be highly offensive to Him?

*Applications.* 1) Let us thank God for His fatherly care; resolve always to act with a full realization of the fact that He is thinking of us and caring for us constantly, and let us never forget that worry about our temporal concerns is an offence against the kindest of fathers.

2) The consideration of God's constant care must bring Him near to us. He does not only live in Heaven, enthroned in majesty, but is near to us and in us. We must learn to realize the divine presence.

II. GOD'S POWERFUL CARE AND MAN'S USELESS ANXIETY. "Behold the birds of the air, for they neither sow, nor do they reap, nor gather into barns and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are you not of much more value than they? And which of you by taking thought, can add to his stature a cubit?" In all the following considerations the Lord, besides giving new motives for leaving to God the care of our temporal concerns, adds strong reasons against undue anxiety on our part.

In nature no being seems happier and enjoys more freedom than the birds. Whilst many other animals lay up provisions for the winter, no member of the feathered tribe ever does so. "They neither sow nor do they reap nor gather into barns;" and yet they suffer no want, because "your heavenly Father feedeth them." But He does not work miracles to support them; He attains His purpose by a wonderful combination of natural agencies. Uncounted millions of little songsters are well fed and cared for every day of the year. And

yet, they are only animals and have to accomplish a purpose in the order of creation which cannot be compared with man's destiny. Finally, God is only their Creator, whilst He is man's Father. If, then He shows Himself such a kind and circumspect provider for them, what will He not do for us, who are "of much more value than they"? For us too, He need not work miracles to secure our well-being, as long as we do not foolishly expose ourselves to useless dangers, but perform our part of the work in the world according to the dictates of right reason. He has but to exercise His ordinary power of directing and governing His creation.

On the other hand, while God's powerful care is sufficient for all this, man's solicitous anxiety in this regard is absolutely useless. The majority of modern interpreters translate Christ's words in some such manner as this: "Which of you by worrying can add but one minute to his span of life?" Our English version is not very exact when it speaks of "stature" and "cubit." For though these two words are derived from the words used in the Latin Vulgate, they refer in our language only to figure and size of body, whilst in Latin "STATURA" can signify both size of body and time of manhood, and "CUBITUM" expresses a measure for size and time. The English "cubit" denotes only a measure of size. As such it represents in both languages a length of almost two feet. But the Latin word can be used also for a very small measure of time. Consequently our English translation really means: "By

thinking you cannot add two feet to your height," an increase which is rather considerable. Thus the translation hardly does justice to Christ's idea, who evidently intends to say that worry for our temporal prosperity is futile. A comparison with the Greek text, moreover, proves that the translation given above is correct.

*Application.* In these words of Christ we see the reason why the childlike trust in Divine Providence and the care-free spirit of enterprise, which we admire in the authors and directors of so many of our charitable institutions, is in reality their best asset. Their confidence compels God, as it were, to make their interests His own. But the same holds good for everybody who has to work for souls. Let us be certain that God really desires to see the work done, and then address ourselves to it with the intention of seeking only His glory and the good of souls. Purity of intention is of paramount importance if we wish to be sure of God's care; for He most assuredly will not add fuel to our vanity and selfishness. But we must not expect that He will at once place at our disposal all the means required to accomplish the task. The birds do not find all the food they need for the whole season on the first day of spring. The servant of God frequently is only helped out of his immediate need; more assistance will be forthcoming when it is actually required. God's help is never too late, it is also not offered before it is needed. He, the All-Knowing One, does not have to allow Himself a margin of safety. Thus, for one who is not yet familiar with the divine ways, there are often times of great suspense and doubt. He must learn to feel sure that God's help will come at the right moment.

III. GOD'S MUNIFICENT CARE. "And for raiment why are you solicitous? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they labor not, neither do they spin. But I say to you, that not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed as one of these. And if the grass of the field, which is to-day, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, God doth so clothe: how much more you, O ye little of faith." Here Our Lord develops another attribute of God's providence. What does man care about the wild lilies growing in the fields? And yet these unimportant and insignificant flowers, without any effort on their part, are decked out in a beauty against which the splendor of kingly robes pales into significance. Solomon had to commandeer the services of his subjects, import the best artists from Phenicia, and send his fleet to Ophir for exquisite materials. And the artists had to toil and employ all their ingenuity to deck him out who according to the ideas of Israel was the greatest king that ever lived. God, without effort, clothes thousands and thousands of lilies, "each single one" of which is "better arrayed" than the great Solomon when he appeared "in all his glory."

The Savior takes His second illustration from "the grass of the field, which to-day stands and to-morrow is cast into the oven." Wild grass is merely tolerated by men as border for their fields or as parasite after the grain has been harvested. After a short growth it is often used for fuel or destroyed as useless. And yet it possesses a beauty of tint which not even the cleverest mixer of colors can reproduce, because it is a crea-

ture of God and, therefore, treated with divine munificence. Will He, then, not look after the pressing daily needs of men?

And here again the Savior adds a powerful motive for discarding all anxiety; He turns to these anxious souls and utters but four small words: "O ye of little faith." But this brief address is fraught with a profound meaning. The word "faith" here means both belief and trust. Christ wants us to see that the solicitude which He blames, originates from a lack of sufficient belief in God and His attributes, and from lack of confidence in His power and fidelity. It is an offence against those very attributes which the Creator as well as every rational being values among the highest—reliability and fidelity. It is that filial offence which every kind and prudent father feels most keenly.

*Application.* God never deals out His graces and helps merely according to the measure of strict necessity. The "lilies of the field" and the "grass of the field" form no indispensable conditions for man's life, still less does the art with which they are decked out. He shows Himself at least equally liberal in the spiritual realm. His service is not all sacrifice for any one that has good will and does not regard whatever he has to do for God as a mere personal loss, every act of self-denial a privation of a valuable good, and the gratification of passions and merely human desires the only source of joy in life. If one for a long time has let God's graces go to waste, he may for a while have to make efforts which are rather hard, before more copious help is again granted him. But even

in this case he is consoled by peace of conscience and "joy in the Holy Ghost." However, this condition is not permanent; nor is the service of the Heavenly Father ever as hard as that of the passions.

IV. GOD'S LOVING CARE. "Be not solicitous therefore, saying: What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewith shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the heathens seek. For your Father knoweth that you have need of all these things." In these verses Christ once more clearly describes the anxiety we have to avoid, and gives further powerful reasons for discarding it. The Greek text is more emphatic than a literal translation into English can express. To do full justice to it we might render the passage as follows: "Now therefore, be not anxious, saying: Alas, what *shall* we have to eat or what *shall* we have to slake our thirst, or what can we throw around us to cover our nakedness? For the heathens anxiously search for all these things; your *heavenly* Father knows that you have need of all these things." Christ, therefore, warns His followers against distressing anxiety concerning temporal needs, and blames it as absolutely un-Christian, as the degrading error of pagans. The good son of a wealthy father is not worried about his needs when he knows that his parent is informed about them. The Christian's father is the "heavenly Father,"—the Greek text here adds the attribute "heavenly." The title of "Father" expresses His infinite love and benevolence; the attribute "heavenly" remind us of His power and

the riches from which He can draw to supply our needs. Only a pagan with his crude notions can doubt this.

*Application.* How true to life are the words of the Savior describing the mental condition of one who has no trust in Providence. How many works for the glory of God does this false solicitude prevent, how frequently does it tempt man to protect his earthly interests at the cost of religion and God's service. It makes him give up God and the Christian view of life, and impels him to render whatever he has left of his religion, merely serviceable to his earthly ends. When he prays, it is only for temporal favors; when he makes any sacrifice, it is merely with a view of securing earthly blessings. This is a perversion of the Kingdom of God with the stigma of paganism. What pagan ever asked his deities for any but earthly and temporal blessings?

But while we are not in danger of falling into these grave errors, we may be tempted to be too much concerned with merely temporal blessings. We must not forget that our first and foremost petition ought to be for the grace of final perseverance or of dying in the state of grace.

V. THE CHRISTIAN'S WELL REGULATED CARE. "Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all these things shall be added unto you. Be not therefore solicitous for to-morrow; for the morrow will be solicitous for itself. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof." True to His principle of never being merely negative in His instructions, the Savior concludes this section of His sermon by showing how a Christian ought to regulate his cares and attend to his earthly

wants. His advice contains three points: a) Make it your first business to be a good member of God's Kingdom; b) live only for the present moment; c) perform your vocational work properly.

a) *"Seek ye in the first place His [God's] justice and His kingdom."* The Greek text puts the words in this order. The expression "God's justice" is a Hebraism, meaning that which is due to God. Let your first care be to obey God's laws and carry out His wishes. Faithfully observe all regulations and directions He gives you, either directly or through His representatives. Thus you will be good and true members of His Kingdom. "And all these things will be added unto you." If we make our spiritual progress our principal aim, God will not only give us all the necessary and proper graces and helps, but throw into the bargain the material goods which we need and which are suitable for us. The Lord does not forbid a well regulated care for our temporal interests; but they must be sought only as a means to attain the salvation of our soul and as helps in God's service. A commentator makes the opposite remark: "What is not sought after in the first place, but only for the sake of another object, is not sought in itself, since only the real end is sought and striven after; for the only reason why the secondary object is desired, is its relation to the primary object and this latter is striven after also in the pursuit of the former." God has made the earth and human nature such that, besides religious and spiritual occupations, much other

work is necessary and thus becomes a real service of His Divine Majesty.

Thus the man who performs labor which is the most menial in the eyes of the world, is to become in the eyes of God the peer of the most exalted ruler and greatest scientist; the layman is raised to the dignity of the priest; the poor are to be the equals of the millionaires. To serve God is to be a king; the royal diadem is the will of God.

*Applications.* 1) In these words we learn the true conception of the occupation assigned to us. It is the means to become virtuous and to serve God. Hence neither self-gratification nor worldly advantages must be its real aim.

2) We learn also what Christ thinks of those ways and means to obtain funds for the support of our churches and institutions, which are not in strict accord with the regulations of Canon Law and the directions of those who rule in His stead. To adopt such methods in disregard of the regulations would hardly be "seeking first what is right and just before God."

b) *"Live only for the present moment."* "Be not therefore solicitous for to-morrow; for the morrow will be solicitous for itself." As said repeatedly before, the Lord objects only to unreasonable anxiety about the future. Unreasonable it can be in two ways. First of all if it creates a distress and a fear which are warranted neither by the nature of the need nor by the condition of the child of God. Secondly if it is caused

by a solicitude concerning eventualities which a sensible man does not think worth his consideration, because they are not well-founded probabilities. Frequently the source of this fear is ignorance of the future. The Lord hints at this when He says: "The morrow will be solicitous for itself." Ever so many difficulties which an anxious mind anticipates never become actualities. "Dealing in future possibilities" causes melancholy, and melancholy is the bane of all human endeavor, spiritual as well as secular.

*Application.* The resolution of St. John Berchmans, "I shall live only for to-day and not be solicitous about to-morrow," must be carried out resolutely by all who wish to serve God. It applies to everything. Let us never ask ourselves the question: "How long will you have to carry this burden? Will you have strength enough to bear it for years and years?"—nor inquire what the future *may* have in store for us in the line of sacrifices and difficulties.

c) *"Perform your vocational work properly."* "Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof." Besides containing a reason for not worrying about the future, these words exhort us to perform our vocational work properly and not to give way to the hardships connected with it. The Greek commentators give as synonyms for "the evil of the day": "fatigue, exhaustion, hard labor, vexation, care, worry." The Lord evidently presupposes that the Christian experiences his full share of bodily and mental fatigue in the performance of his daily duties. It must be so; otherwise work would not be the

penance God imposed on all men after the fall in Paradise. But worrying to-day about the possible troubles of to-morrow only makes to-day's work harder and does not render to-morrow's burden a whit easier.

However, Christ in these words also shows that He wants us to work hard with body and mind and not to waste time in "genteel leisure." Examining the history of all the Saints canonized by the Church, we do not, even among the highest contemplatives, find one who did not work hard besides praying hard. All were either industrious workers or patient sufferers; suffering patiently is hard work, too.

*Application.* 1) Let us never think that we have earned the right to a "genteel" leisure, may spend part of our time in the performance of some or even many spiritual exercises and indulge for the remainder of the time in idleness. Any one who tries to lead a life consisting merely of hours of prayer and hours of leisure, will soon find out that "Satan finds some evil still for idle hands to do."

2) Let us not fail to notice the wonderful wisdom, we might say the divine common sense, of Christ's asceticism, as expressed in this entire part of the Sermon on the Mount. There is nothing constrained or exaggerated. He bases all on the fact that, through the Redemption, man is a child of God, but a child under age; the plenitude of supernatural manhood is reached only in the next World. Consequently, on earth he must yield to God the submission and trust which a minor child must show to his parents. All Christian virtue is of small account unless it is founded on this childlike submission to God.

COLLOQUY. Thank the Savior for the lessons He has given you in this passage. Be sorry for the faults committed against them. Ask for grace to carry them out more faithfully. Ask for the clear and constant realization that "only one thing is necessary," namely, to serve God, and for joyful confidence in God's paternal providence all the days of your life. "The Lord ruleth me: and I shall want nothing" (Ps. 22,1).

## Meditation 17

### EVERYBODY FOR HIMSELF

(Matt. 7,1–6)

"Judge not, that you may not be judged. For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged: and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why seest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye; and seest not the beam that is in thy own eye? Or how sayest thou to thy brother: Let me cast the mote out of thy eye: and behold a beam is in thy own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thy own eye, and then shalt thou see to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye. Give not that which is holy to dogs; neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest perhaps they trample them under their feet, and turning upon you, they tear you."

Our Lord now speaks of temptations of another kind. They are all the more dangerous because they assail us under the appearance of good. A false zeal may lead us into forming rash judgments, administering corrections without warrant, and imparting injudicious information on points of religion. Against these faults He inculcates leniency in judgment, due care for our

own improvement, and prudence in religious instruction.

Let us ask for the grace of an enlightened zeal, both for our own perfection and the salvation of others.

1. DO NOT JUDGE OTHERS. "Judge not, that you may not be judged. For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged: and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why seest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye; and seest not the beam that is in thy own eye? Or how sayest thou to thy brother: Let me cast the mote out of thy eye: and behold, a beam is in thy own eye? Thou hypocrite." At first sight it would appear to be a holy zeal to counteract sin and wrong wherever found. But in man self-love and the consciousness of duty are constantly at war with each other. The more self-love blinds him to his own faults, the more it sharpens his eyes for everything that is defective in others or at least can be suspected or misinterpreted. He finds ever so many reasons to gloss over, or at least to excuse his own defects, but judges his neighbor with extreme severity.

Christ proposes weighty motives for avoiding this fault. He says: "Judge not, that you may not be judged." We draw God's condemnation down upon us by the injustice which lies in exaggerating the faults of others, attributing to them wrong motives, choosing the worst interpretation in cases in which more than one is

possible, and demanding more of others than of ourselves.

Christ continues: "And with what measure you mete, it shall be measured out to you again." He who has no mercy on others, renders himself unworthy of God's mercy. And yet in that mercy is our only salvation. For, if God treated our negligences and infidelities here on earth with strict justice, how few graces should we receive, and how hard would it be to save our soul. Our leniency in judging others determines the leniency with which God will, in this life, treat and, in a way, overlook our sins.

We find another reason in the next lines, which belong to the most sarcastic words Christ ever uttered. To judge others is arrogant hypocrisy. The Lord mercilessly tears away the veil with which man tries to cover his own faults by criticizing the comparatively small shortcomings of others, or, as He calls it, "seeing the mote in the eye of thy brother, but not the beam in thy own eye." How true to life are His words when He depicts the hypocrite as so deeply concerned about improving others and trying to correct their small, frequently merely imaginary defects and ignoring his own.

The mote which he sees in the eye of his brother is often enough the projection of the beam in his own. He is really a hypocrite; for he pretends to be animated by zeal for holiness, whilst in reality it is nothing but wounded self-love or a "holier-than-thou" mind that prompts him.

*Applications.* 1) We are not expected to call right what is wrong. What Christ demands of us is this. First of all, we ought not to mind the doings of others, but strictly attend to our own affairs, unless we have a duty to watch over others. Secondly, we ought to put the more favorable construction on what we cannot help noticing in others, wherever more than one explanation is possible. Thirdly, when we notice something that is manifestly wrong, we ought to excuse it as due to want of knowledge, absence of malicious intent, and human frailty. For the number of those who maliciously do wrong, thank God, is rather small.

2) It would seem that the tendency to judge others has become more pronounced in our time. Scandal is a topic which fills many a column in the daily press. It has always been a favorite subject for conversation. Let us never begin or promote such conversations, and be silent and change the subject when others introduce them.

3) How insignificant frequently are the faults of our neighbor which offend us. What seems unbearable to us, often is no moral fault at all. The more harshly a defect grates upon us, the more reason for us to fear that we are prejudiced or that the fault in reality lies not in our neighbor, but in ourselves. His action, or a trait of his character may touch a sore spot, a real defect in our own make-up. Upon examination we may discover that we have the very fault we blame in him, or at least that we are narrow-minded or lack patience.

II. CORRECT YOUR OWN FAULTS. "Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thy own eye, and then shalt

thou see to cast the mote out of thy brother's eye." It is not the right kind of zeal that sits in judgment on the faults of others. The Savior draws our attention away from the faults of others and fixes it on our own. But it is not enough to confess and admit our faults to ourselves without glossing them over. We are responsible for them to God. Therefore, out with that beam! Zeal for what is right is always in order when it concerns ourselves. And it is all the more so, when God has given us the vocation of helping others and curing them of their faults. What an impertinent demand would it be to expect another patiently to let us manipulate with his eye, when our own vision is seriously interfered with by a beam. Would the other not have every reason to say: "Physician, heal thyself"? Then the would-be physician would have to withdraw in disgrace, to the detriment of God's interests. But the disgrace before men would be the least; much more important would be the responsibility before God.

*Applications.* 1) Therefore, when we feel inclined to judge others, let us rather be urged by this temptation to examine ourselves more closely. For as soon as this becomes a habitual temptation, it is at least probable that we have been going down in our spiritual life, that the mote we notice in the eye of another is an illusion caused by a beam in our own. And if every other point of our own spirituality is still in good condition, charity certainly is declining. Really holy people never judge others.

2) He to whom the souls of others are entrusted, will have to render a double account. What he preaches to

others, he ought first to preach with even more force to himself. His life must be a more impressive sermon than his words, so that he may be able to say with St. Paul: "Be ye followers of me, as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 4,16).

III. GUARD REVERENTLY WHAT IS HOLY. "Give not that which is holy to dogs; neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest perhaps they trample them under their feet, and turning upon you, they tear you." Here we find still another reason why we must prudently moderate our well-intentioned zeal for Christ's cause in instructing and correcting others. Christ explains it by two comparisons.

In Oriental cities the garbage is thrown into the streets. Ownerless dogs rummage through it, drag it around and carry it off. No matter what one puts out on the street, those animals treat it like garbage. Moreover, some pearls in external appearance resemble certain fruits or grains with which unclean animals are fed. But if one would foolishly cast them before swine, what would be the result? They would trample them in the mud. Nay more, disappointed at not receiving what their instincts crave for, those half-wild beasts might attack the owner of those precious articles and tear him to pieces.

In both comparisons Christ has reference to persons who are not only in partial or total ignorance of the doctrines of Revelation, but, if informed, would spurn them. There are people who transgress God's law in ignorance or at least without fully realizing the gravity

of their offences. If they would be told the truth, they would not mend their way. Thus what so far was no sin for them, would now become a deliberate transgression, and what was less grievous, would become more wicked. Nay, many of them would not only spurn God's grace like the dogs which treat precious pearls as garbage, but like disappointed swine, they would turn against God and discharge their venom also against him who tried to enlighten and correct them.

*Applications.* 1) We may easily become so accustomed to holy things that we forget their value and their sacred character. They are not intended to furnish entertainment for the curious and to serve for ill-timed jokes. In our day again a sort of questioners has arisen who are not earnestly searching for the truth, but merely "want to know what the Catholic Church has to say on this point," in order to sit in judgment and render foolish verdicts with more than papal infallibility. "The Church" in reality has nothing to say; it is Christ who speaks through her. To answer those conceited questioners is merely to cast pearls before swine.

2) Pastoral prudence and charity oblige us at times to refrain from telling the truth when persons are bona fide ignorant. In this regard we must be particularly careful when dealing with adults. They ought not to be corrected unless there is a well-founded hope that they will accept the correction in the proper spirit. But this ought not to be taken as an excuse by religious superiors, for their neglect in correcting the public faults of their subjects, even though the latter have been in the Order for many years.

Superiors are bound to correct public violations of the rule even if the culprit will not accept the correction in good part; for otherwise the bad example is apt to ruin the discipline of the community.

COLLOQUY. Acts of sorrow for all false severity with others and all false leniency with ourselves; of resolution to be severe with ourselves and broad-minded with others; of petition for the grace to fulfill our duties with holy seriousness, so that we may sanctify not only others, but above all ourselves. "Give me wisdom, that sitteth by thy throne, and cast me not off from among thy children" (Wisd. 9,4).

## Meditation 18

### GOD'S GRACE

### (Matt. 7,7–12)

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find: knock, and it shall be opened to you. For every one that asketh, receiveth: and he that seeketh, findeth: and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened. Or what man is there among you, of whom his son shall ask bread, will he reach him a stone? Or if he shall ask him a fish, will he reach him a serpent? If you then being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children; how much more will your Father who is in heaven, give good things to them that ask him? All things therefore whatsoever you would that men do to you, do you also to them. For this is the law and the prophets."

The Savior now explains how we can obtain the strength to carry out the frequently difficult directions given in the preceding passages. We must ask for God's grace, but our petition must be humble, full of confidence, accompanied by resignation to the divine will and by sincere charity towards men. Then in one short sentence He points out the norm of true charity.

Let us ask for the grace of a deep conviction of the

fact that we are weak and do not render God any profit by submitting to His paternal rule; and that we may approach Him with confidence in spite of our unworthiness, and with a heart full of fraternal charity.

I. MAN MUST ALWAYS HUMBLY ASK FOR GRACE. "Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and you shall find: knock, and it shall be opened to you. For every one that asketh, receiveth: and he that seeketh, findeth: and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened." The history of mankind before Christ is a record of great corporal and spiritual misery. Worse still than this was man's impotence to regain the supernatural gifts which God had bestowed on our first parents and intended for all their descendants. Ought we then not to be filled with a keen sense of destitution and a yearning desire akin to that of the prodigal son, who said: "I will arise and go to my father," beg him to take me back as a slave and to let me have only a little share in the blessings of his house?

God, through Christ, exhorts us to beg Him. For it is evident that Jesus is not speaking of asking human beings, knocking at their door, seeking on this earth, since everybody knows only too well that not every petition addressed to men, every knock at their doors, every search on earth meets with the desired success. Christ can have reference only to the Father in Heaven. We must "seek," conceive a sincere and trustful desire. We must rouse ourselves to earnest efforts and "knock" like a stranger or rather like the wayward son, who re-

turns to his father's house. If we do so, we have Christ's assurance that our request will be heard. Never will God's kindness be exhausted nor the Father's house be so crowded that we cannot find a place in it. Though ever so many come, Jesus has solemnly announced: "Every one that asketh, receiveth: and he that seeketh, findeth: and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened."

God is in earnest when He assures us that He wishes to save all men through Christ. He makes only one condition: Man must fully acknowledge the misery he brought on himself through sin, and humbly ask for mercy. As long as he still seeks his happiness in what the world desires, or resigns himself to his fate without a proper effort to get out of it, there is no hope for him. But when he overcomes his pride so far as to beg, and his indolence so far as to seek and knock in humble contrition and confidence like a poor, hungry, freezing beggar, God's kindness knows no bounds.

*Applications.* 1) Here we see what dispositions we must try to rouse in a sinner in order to effect his conversion; humility and confidence in acknowledging his misery, in begging God's pardon, and in asking Him for help. Only with these dispositions will a conversion be lasting.

2) Here we also learn what is necessary for us if we wish to remain faithful to God and our state of life. We must at all times preserve a lively conviction of our numerous past offences and present imperfections. We must remain constantly aware of our own weakness, pray and secure the prayers of others that we may persevere. A priest or a religious who does not know what he should

request for himself in prayer, except relief when he is in trouble about temporal things, does not realize his condition. Humble petition, far from discouraging us whilst making us constantly aware of our faults, increases confidence in God and love for Him.

II. NO GRACE TOO PRECIOUS FOR GOD'S KINDNESS. "Or what man is there among you, of whom if his son shall ask bread, will he reach him a stone? Or if he ask him a fish, will he reach him a serpent? If you then being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children: how much more will your Father who is in heaven, give good things to them that ask him?" The pledge that God gives to every one who asks Him, is His paternal kindness. This kindness Christ now describes in a very touching manner.

No father is so hard-hearted that he would make sport of his hungry child and, instead of bread, put a stone into his little hand. In Palestine the bread is baked in such a manner that a child cannot differentiate it from a stone merely by its appearance. No, the father gives him the bread, which he has earned in the sweat of his brow and of which he possibly has to deprive himself. And even if his child begs for more than is necessary, for something that will make the bread more palatable—in Palestine it is usually fish—he would certainly not reach him a serpent that might kill the little one.

A child frequently cannot tell the difference between a stone and bread, between a fish and a snake. But the father's eye watches carefully that the little one re-

ceive only "good gifts," as Christ says, wholesome food, and of this more than is absolutely necessary, also some delicacies. Though sin has made men very selfish, even sinful parents, as a rule, will be unselfish in their care for their children. Therefore, the Lord draws this conclusion by saying in emphatic terms: "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children: how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" He will bestow not merely the necessaries, but "good gifts" in abundance.

*Applications.* 1) Therefore, all diffidence would be an insult offered to God; only unbounded confidence is in order. If God would refuse us after these clear words of the Savior, and instead of giving us food would allow us to starve, He would cruelly deceive us. We depend on Him for everything in a higher degree even than a helpless child depends on his father. For God, moreover, it is much easier to fulfill even our farthest reaching desires than it is for a strong and hard-working man to support his child. Let us not think more or less unconsciously that prayer and petition is a mere formality which makes no impression on God.

2) It will happen to us short-sighted men that, like children, we stretch out our hand towards a stone, believing it to be bread, or try to grasp a poisonous serpent, believing it to be a harmless or delightful object. In such cases God, while not granting the stone or withdrawing the serpent, will give us "good gifts." Therefore, if our prayers are not heard in the manner we wish, this is

no reason to believe that they are useless. It would be positively cruel were God always to grant us exactly that for which we pray. It is also true that a gift, if bestowed at the time we ask for it, may not only be unprofitable, but harmful, while later on it will be very useful. God knows best what "good gifts" to bestow and when.

III. GOD'S BOUNTY SUFFICIENT FOR ALL. "All things whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you also to them. For this is the law and the prophets." For the Israelites the law and the prophets voiced the various precepts of God in the matter of charity. In the New Testament God has but one law for Christians: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." The Savior adds only a brief explanation to it, which covers all possible cases: "All things therefore whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you also to them." For the Christian this is "the law and the prophets." The measure and norm by which he must determine what he wishes others to do for him, must serve him as norm for deciding how to practice fraternal charity. His fellow-men are like him, have the same needs, entertain the same wishes. This is the will of God.

If he does God's will, God will fulfil his desire. He need not fear that he will suffer a real loss if he, as far as lies in his power, makes himself the instrument of divine love and treats everybody as he wishes everybody to treat him. Is it not a general experience that even when we stint ourselves in the service of sweet charity, the benefit comes back to us with increased proportions?

But it is evident from this rule that Christ does not speak of a sentimental humanitarianism, but a sound and manly charity. For He says: "Love thy neighbor as thyself." As Christian self-love is no effete self-indulgence, so charity towards others must not be doting, but reasonable. It must be enlightened and refuse to the neighbor what is wrong or hurtful. It must place his eternal above his temporal interests.

*Applications.* 1) Here we find a great means to render our prayers more efficacious; it is charity towards all, but bestowed in a manner that would not offend us if we were the recipients. Let us ask ourselves: "How would you wish somebody else to speak or act towards you in this case?"

2) Christ here teaches an equality which is truly wonderful. It is not that conceited equality which says: "I am as good as anybody else," but that which is convinced that "everybody else is as good as I." It does not say: "I want to have everything that somebody else has," (this would lead to class-hatred and mean jealousy) but it says: "I wish that everybody else be as contented as I am."

COLLOQUY. Thank Christ for the charity and confidence which He has brought into the world; petition Him for the grace of praying in the right spirit, with a sincere desire, a child-like confidence, and humble resignation to God's will; pray for the spread of Christian charity in the world, which is reverting to paganism. "Hear, O Lord, my prayer: and let my cry come to thee" (Ps. 101,2).

## Meditation 19

### INDEPENDENT OF MEN

(Matt. 7,13–20)

"Enter ye in at the narrow gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat. How narrow is the gate, and strait is the way that leadeth to life; and few there are that find it. Beware of false prophets, who come to you in the clothing of sheep, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. By their fruits you shall know them. Do men gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, and the evil tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can an evil tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, shall be cut down and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits you shall know them."

While being charitable towards all men, the members of God's Kingdom must preserve a proper independence in matters of conscience, so as not to miss the road to Heaven. That road is narrow and steep, and the multitude does not walk on it. The masses are, therefore, not proper guides in religious and moral matters.

Still greater caution is to be exercised concerning false prophets, who mislead people under the pretence of holiness and deeper insight into the truths of religion. The Savior furnishes a sure criterion for discovering such pseudo-prophets: "By their fruits you shall know them."

Let us ask for grace, that we may heed the warning of Christ and always follow the road He points out, even though it is steep and narrow.

I. THE MULTITUDE IS NOT ON THE ROAD TO LIFE. "Enter ye in at the narrow gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat. How narrow is the gate, and straight is the way that leadeth to life; and few there are that find it." To be received into the Kingdom of God is an unmerited grace; but to remain a faithful member of it, is the work of the individual, aided, of course, by divine grace. This work means opposition to the world and the life of the world, and it causes the persecutions of which Christ spoke in the eighth beatitude.

However, this is not the only difficulty. The ways of the world in themselves are a temptation. They secure a very comfortable life; if efforts are made and comforts forgone by the children of the world, it is done for some very tangible object belonging to earth. Man's lower instincts always demand tangible results close at hand. Since the disciple of Christ cannot rid himself of his lower nature, he must constantly fight against it.

Add to this the power of bad example, which is all the greater the more numerous are those who give it.

Finally, there is a general tendency in men to avoid the charge of singularity and to hate those who are out of harmony with the crowd. Tacitus, who observed the Christians in the days of Nero, blamed them for being singular and called them "the abomination of the human race." Hence, the Savior had good reasons to demand that His followers should make themselves independent of men.

The multitude, according to Him, is a bad guide. For at the end of the highway which they choose, and which they want everybody else to take, there yawn the broad, open gates of eternal ruin. The Christian's path is steep and the gate at which it terminates is narrow, permitting entrance not to compact crowds, but only to individuals; yet it is the only entrance to Heaven. The Christian must raise his eyes to the beautiful mansions built upon the heights, accessible only by means of a steep and thorny ascent.

*Applications.* 1) The Savior demands of His followers great moral strength and self-reliance in opposing the multitude. But while our holy religion is not a religion of weaklings, it demands not a boastful showy heroism nor only an occasional heroic deed performed in a fit of momentary enthusiasm, but faithful perseverance, not regarding whims and moods, the world and men, but acting against one's own comfort and, what probably is the hardest, against the ways of others.

Two truths are not sufficiently clear to many Catholics,

who forget that a Christian must not adopt the ways of the world, and think that as long as they attend Mass on Sundays and receive the Sacraments regularly, they may ape the un-Christian world in almost everything except positive infidelity and downright immorality. We must walk the steep and narrow path of mortification and self-denial and be free from human respect. Some Catholic writers cause positive harm by praising our young people for being at the same time pious Christians and perfect men and women of the world.

2) The priest and the religious, by their very state of life, are in open and professed opposition to the world. Hence, worldliness in thought and action is doubly blameable in them. They must guard against secularism. The fear of being considered singular is no excuse. Good Catholics must be singular.

II. NOT EVERYBODY DRESSED IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING IS A PROPHET. "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in the clothing of sheep, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves." The multitude is not the most dangerous enemy of the soul. Its manifest vices easily open the eyes of everyone who has good will, so that he sees the consequences of following its wicked example. More dangerous are the seducers who come dressed in the mantle of prophets, whose mouths dribble with pious words—especially dangerous if their office would lead one to expect that they are safe guides on the road to Heaven. In order to gain entrance into the fold, they conceal their wolfish nature under the clothing of

sheep. But once inside, they show their true character; and it is very difficult to escape these ravenous beasts, which are recognized only when they show their fangs and crouch for the fatal attack. For this reason the Savior now becomes very emphatic in His warnings. Whilst speaking about the broad way of the multitudes, He contented Himself with pointing out the unhappy ending. But now He raises His voice in a very serious warning: 'Beware, be on your guard, against false prophets!" Only he is safe who realizes that there are wolves in the guise of sheep and keeps these rapacious beasts at a safe distance.

*Applications.* 1) Of late years Holy Church has been very solicitous in regard to "false prophets." Pope Pius X, in his Encyclical on preaching the Word of God, issued a positive prohibition against quoting secular writers as authorities in the pulpit, and against using non-Catholic authors on exegesis as commentators of the Scriptures. The new Code of Canon Law contains stringent regulations concerning publications of a religious or moral nature, the censorship of books in every shape and form, and the reading of works containing false doctrines. Questions of a public nature, economic and social problems, are too frequently discussed in the secular press from a standpoint contrary to revealed religion, and yet, the pronunciamentos of these publications are taken as gospel-truths even by Catholics, who never suspect that they are sponsoring un-Christian views. The numerous Encyclicals of Leo XIII and the decisions of the Roman Congregations prove this.

2) All heresies and schisms have been launched under the appearance of zeal for religion. Our zeal must always be an enlightened one; otherwise we are in danger of becoming the victims of false prophets. How many false devotions have been condemned by the popes during the last few decades. Time and again the Church has had to interfere in the matter of false visions, faked miracles, feigned supernatural states, and the like. Our safety lies in a wise conservatism, in strict adherence to the traditions and usages of the Church, and in ready obedience to authority.

III. THE UNFAILING CRITERION. "By their fruits you shall know them. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, and the evil tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can an evil tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, shall be cut down, and shall be cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits you shall know them." The Savior does not confine Himself to a warning, but gives us a sign by which we can infallibly distinguish true from false prophets. The bare trunks of different trees and the branches and twigs of shrubs can easily be mistaken, but where grapes grow, you have a true vine and not a bush of thorns, and where you can pluck figs, you have a fig-tree and not a thistle.

The same holds good of "prophets" and their doctrines. It is possible that for awhile we may doubt their character. We have to refrain from making a decision

till results appear and meanwhile assume a waiting attitude. But Christ gives us a sure criterion even for cases in which the effects are uncertain. If no results appear, the prophet or his doctrine is a useless, barren tree, therefore, certainly not good. As a barren tree harms the owner by uselessly occupying space, so the prophet who brings no results, takes his followers away from the pursuit of what is certainly profitable for their souls and thus inflicts a real loss on them. Like the barren tree, he and his doctrine must no longer be permitted to occupy space, and we must not be so foolish as to devote time and energy to his aims and counsels.

*Applications.* 1) The Savior warns us, not so much against persons as against doctrines. The propounders of false doctrines and systems often enough are animated by very good intentions, but unknowingly let themselves be used by the enemy of mankind. It will at times be necessary also to warn others. We may be obliged, above all in private direction, to caution against certain ascetical publications, especially such as are too rigoristic or too lax, or, tainted by psychoanalysis and a false psychology, pretend to represent the spirit of the age, or under the garb of asceticism champion an unreasonable care for the body. To recommend physical culture as a means of fostering the spirit of mortification or acquiring the Christian virtue of self-control, is not in harmony with the traditions of the Church. Even a well-meaning director becomes a false prophet if, in the spiritual guidance of religious, he does not adhere strictly to the spirit of the institute to which they belong. Each religious order has its own rule and its own spirit. It is not right to try to influence, nay

to force, religious to adopt one's own methods and practices, when by their rule these religious are bound to another form of asceticism.

2) By this test we must also probe the ideas, emotions, inclinations, and aversions which strive to enter our soul. In our heart both good and bad roots try to sprout and grow into trees. We must put the axe to the roots which do not develop good trees, not merely to those which grow into trees producing bad fruits.

COLLOQUY. Pray for the gift of discernment of spirits and for strength to follow Jesus on the strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life. "Blessed the man who hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, . . . but his will is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he shall meditate day and night" (Ps. 1, 1.2).

## Meditation 20

### HEARING AND DOING

### (Matt. 7,21–27)

"Not every one that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven: but he that doth the will of my Father who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven. Many will say to me in that day: Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and cast out devils in thy name, and done many miracles in thy name? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, you that work iniquity. Every one therefore that heareth these my words, and doth them, shall be likened to a wise man that built his house upon a rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and they beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it was founded on a rock. And every one that heareth these my words, and doth them not, shall be like a foolish man that built his house upon the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and they beat upon that house, and it fell, and great was the fall thereof."

There is one more serious admonition which Christ addresses to His hearers. It is not enough to listen with eagerness and enthusiasm to His words, but they must be carried out. Let people ever so often appeal to

Him, nay let them work miracles in His name: on the day of judgment the Lord will reject every one who has not lived according to His teaching. Life has trials for every one. Only one thing can uphold us in these trials—faithful adherence to Christ and conscientious observance of His doctrines. This He explains by the parable of the house built on sand and the house built on a rock.

Let us ask for the grace of not being merely dumb admirers and eloquent propounders of Christ's doctrines, but "doers of the word."

I. ONLY CONDUCT IN ACCORDANCE WITH CHRIST'S DOCTRINE BRINGS SALVATION. "Not every one that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven: but he that doth the will of my Father, who is in heaven, he shall enter the kingdom of heaven. Many will say in that day: Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and cast out devils in thy name, and done many miracles in thy name? And then I will profess unto them: I never knew you: depart from me, you that work iniquity." The Eternal Father has determined the conditions on which one will be admitted to His Kingdom and retain membership in it. The Sermon on the Mount has no other purpose than to make these conditions known and to invite people to comply with them. Nothing is farther from Christ's thoughts than to build up a theoretical system of doctrines in which the human mind takes a barren delight. With holy seriousness He urges action all through the sermon, and in con-

clusion explicitly emphasizes action as His chief demand. Mere regard for His person and empty signs of honor, such as the repetition of the title "Lord, Lord," have absolutely no value in His eyes. If one wishes to belong to His Kingdom, one has to do the will of His Father.

Nay more, somebody may by his preaching spread the Kingdom of God, he may even work miracles and utter prophecies in Christ's name; all this is unprofitable unless the will of God becomes the controlling norm of his life. He who in the end has nothing to show but external deeds, will have to hear the sentence of the inexorable Judge: "I never knew you: depart from me, you that work inquity."

*Applications.* 1) Nothing can avail us but faithful and conscientious obedience to God's holy will. Let us not indulge in self-deception. The demands of the Sermon on the Mount bind us all, priests and religious, bishops and pope. Christ will never recognize as His own any one who does not comply with them, no matter how near his vocation or his office place him to the Savior. The doctrines of Christ are for us not merely a source for beautiful thoughts, serious admonitions and sublime instructions. For us, too, they are first of all a rule of life, nay for us more than for the laity. The day will come when we shall have to render an account of the manner in which we have carried out the Sermon of the Mount. If we have neglected its injunctions, we cannot allege as excuse what many a lay person may be entitled to say: "I did not know." For we who preach and admonish

others, who stir up their conscience, know better. Or are our admonitions and expostulations not meant seriously? In that case we should have to be silent and take our place among those "who work iniquity"; the terrible word of the Savior would strike us, "Depart from me."

2) We must frequently insist in sermons and instructions on the necessity of observing the precepts of Christ not from worldly and temporal considerations, but from religious motives. Why do so many persons who have been faultless for a long time, fall deeply? They were good merely because their nature and their surroundings were favorable, but their morality was not based on the right foundation. We often say that morality must be based on religion. Yes, but on practical religion, which renders men consciously and deliberately subject to God's will.

II. TEMPTATIONS, THE LOT OF EVERY MAN. "Every man therefore that heareth these my words, and doth them, shall be likened to a wise man that built his house upon a rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and they beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it was founded on a rock." The image which the Lord depicts in these words was familiar to His audience. It might seem exaggerated to us; but it corresponds to the reality in Palestine. During the rainy season torrents pour down of which we have no experience in our zone. The soil is softened and saturated with water to the depth of several feet; ravines and depressions which have no water during the dry months, now become the beds of wild streams, which turn everything

up and carry trees, blocks of stone and whole houses away with them. These rains are accompanied by violent storms. Nothing that is not absolutely firm and solid can withstand these attacks from above and below. Only a house built upon a rock and well knitted together has nothing to fear. Wind and water cannot force their way through the rock and undermine the foundation of the building nor find crevices in the structure, widen them and weaken the walls or carry off the roof.

A solid foundation and permanent structure is demanded not only to save the building, but to shelter the inmates and their property against rain, wind, and inundation.

What is this firm rock? The Savior Himself tells us: "Every one that heareth my words and doth them." From what we have heard before, we have to draw the conclusion that He does not mean merely the individual precepts He has given, but above all their underlying and supporting basis—the will of God. How often does He not mention the will of God in this sermon! Even kindliness, humility, chastity, mortification will not save man unless they are practiced because God wills it.

God's will is the only element which gives firmness and stability in all the conditions and situations of life; for everybody will be faced by situations in which he can remain true to God only by a complete surrender to Him and His holy will. But that surrender is impossible until we seriously resolve to make God's will the

only end of our life and confirm this resolution day by day.

As long as we conceive the will of God as an oppressive necessity, we shall be very unhappy and soon give up. But if we see it as it really is, as the wish of a loving Father, who helps and strengthens us and seeks only our own good, and as the absolutely necessary means not only of eternal life, but also of contentment here on earth, we shall find it much easier and draw much consolation from it.

*Applications.* 1) It is necessary for us to foster and deepen the sentiment of total surrender to God's holy will by a consideration of the reasons why we ought to seek nothing but the divine pleasure, by a frequent renewal of the good intention, by prayer, and finally by making good use of the great but rare occasions on which God demands an actual surrender of our entire self, our dearest wishes and greatest fears. One sacrifice of this kind will establish the Kingdom of God more firmly in our soul than years of ordinary prayer and sacrifice.

2) It is also necessary that we persuade the souls entrusted to our care to perform their duties and make sacrifices from this motive. They must realize practically, (not merely in theory) what the will of God is and how they must fulfill it. As was said before, we must make them religiously good, not naturally good.

III. KEEP THE WORDS OF CHRIST OR PERISH. "And every one that heareth these my words, and doth them not, shall be like a foolish man that built his house upon

the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and they beat upon that house, and it fell, and great was the fall thereof." Many men are not like prudent architects because they do not foresee the strain to which their buildings will be exposed. It is hard work to dig down to bedrock and to fit and cement all the blocks together in the proper manner. Not only must the foundation be firm, but the walls must be strong and well-knitted together; otherwise the tempests will ruin the edifice. Is not he a fool who exposes himself to the danger of having only ruins at a time when he most needs the sheltering roof? Such a foolish man is he who does not make the will of God the motive and norm of his life in all situations.

Severe trials from without and violent temptations from within assail every one who has attained to the use of reason. Natural considerations will not help him to control his passions and make his will firm. His morality will collapse unless based on the will of God. "And great was the fall thereof." "A foolish man," this last word of Christ rang over the plain of Galilee and re-echoes through the ages over all the earth, "a foolish man was he that built his house upon the sand."

*Applications.* 1) God's will must be the basis of our moral life, not only as the motive for our decisions, but also as the directive of our virtue. Good people at times are disconcerted because they cannot practice virtue in the manner they wish. They are anxious to work, but poor health prevents them; they wish to pray much, but have to attend to a host of distracting details; they possess

excellent qualifications for a certain work and are appointed to a task for which they think themselves unfit. If they do not see the will of God in these disappointments and content themselves with doing what they can under these conditions, they become discouraged, disgruntled, useless for God and men. Their spiritual house is destroyed by the storm and carried away by the flood.

2) We see how important it is in the direction of souls, in the confessional, the schoolroom, the superior's office, not to base our work on purely natural considerations. We must make whole-hearted Christians of the souls entrusted to us, so that they rest their entire moral activity on the will of God.

COLLOQUY. Pray for strength to carry out Christ's doctrines exactly, in joyful contentment, with a firm trust in God's power and love. "Expect the Lord, do manfully, and let thy heart take courage, and wait for the Lord" (Ps. 26,14).

## Meditation 21

### RESULTS OF CHRIST'S SERMON

(Matt. 7,28–8,1)

"And it came to pass when Jesus had fully ended these words, the people were in admiration of his doctrine. For he was teaching them as one having power, and not as the Scribes and Pharisees. And when he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him."

In these words the Evangelist records the immediate effect of the greatest sermon ever given. It was surprise at the doctrine and admiration of the Preacher. He had not spoken like the Scribes, who stuck to the letter of the Old Law and by unnatural artifices and forced explanations had discovered 613 incongruous precepts therein. Christ's teaching was brief, simple, and logical. His delivery had not been like the punctilious exhortations of the Rabbis; He "spoke as one having power," in fact with the same authority as God Himself on Sinai. Hence they offered Him a great ovation.

Let us ask for the grace that we may not stop at sterile wonder over His doctrine and a vague realization that He and His teaching are totally different from the worldly-wise and their platitudes, but that, knowing

the divine power with which He speaks, we may follow Him as Our Lord and God.

I. THE CONTENTS OF CHRIST'S DOCTRINE. A. SUMMARY. "When Jesus had fully ended these words." After listening to the details of Christ's sermon, we will review it as a whole.

a) *The basic idea,* which penetrates the whole discourse, in its last analysis is the total overthrow of the ideas which had so far governed mankind. Until then everybody had believed that the world must move around man. Now Jesus showed that God is the center of all, that man must, in practice as well as in theory, acknowledge the dominion of God and let His will determine everything for him. Poor, helpless, mortal men without exception had suffered not only from the selfishness of others, but even more from their own selfishness. Now God, without merit on their part, wished to place them all under His paternal rule.

b) *Compared with the Old Law,* His doctrine deepens morality and elevates man to an ethical height that was impossible in the Old Testament. All our duties toward God, our neighbor and ourselves are brought to perfection not only in the matter concerned, but in the motive which prompts their fulfilment, which is filial love of God, who has become our Father, and brotherly love of our neighbor, who has become our brother in Christ.

c) *The condition for entering the Kingdom of God* is that man yield to God complete and undivided love

and loyalty and seek nothing but the fulfilment of the divine will. Even the most urgent necessities of life may not demand a separate place beside the will of God. Man must, in a way, be detached from the earth, and even from his fellowmen. Neither anxiety for bodily needs, nor a false zeal for the welfare of others, nor regard for their demands may draw him away from the one thing necessary, obedience to the will of God.

And as the individual may err in the explanation and application of Christ's moral principles, he must be subject to the authority established by the Savior and represented by the chosen twelve surrounding Him during His sermon, the men proclaimed as the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

d) *The promise* held out to those who accept these doctrines and carry them out, is safety for time and eternity.

*Application.* The conclusion to be drawn from all this may be stated in one word: "Be a child of God." Love Him, trust Him, serve Him alone. We must try to ground ourselves very firmly in this spirit.

B. SIMPLICITY ITS CHARACTERISTIC. Experience fully bears out the assertion that every question and every situation which can arise in the moral life of a Christian is met by the moral code of Christ. And yet, this code does not consist of a multitude of bewildering articles. Every regulation is a logical consequence from one properly understood and consistently applied prin-

ciple, namely, that God, whilst retaining His right as Creator, has become men's Father through the Incarnation. From this truth follows every other, e. g.: that all men are brothers in the supernatural order, that Heaven is our true home and destiny, that God's will must be our only concern, that we must trust God even for our temporal subsistence. What Christ says about scandal, hypocrisy, charity, humility, piety, right and wrong zeal, love of enemies—follows logically from this truth. Thus His code is distinguished by a marked simplicity. This is the reason why we can so easily remember our duties as Christians.

*Application.* Here we see two very important characteristics of the true Christian asceticism—unity and simplicity. It has but one end, to lead to perfect love of God. Every other virtue is either a help or a complement of charity, not an end in itself. Therefore, whatever threatens to make things complicated in spiritual life, to cause confusion or artificiality, like the 613 precepts of the Rabbis and all the rules of the "Haggada" and "Hachaloth," the "Traditions of the Ancients" and the "Hedge of the Law," must be set aside. St. Ignatius warns us against everything that tends to complicate matters in spiritual life, to scatter and weaken our forces, and to waste our time on useless things.

II. THE POWER OF CHRIST. "The people were in admiration at his doctrines. For he was teaching them as one having power, and not as the Scribes and Pharisees." Christ's sermons held the multitudes spell-bound

in surprise and admiration. Nobody, no doctor of the law, no prophet, not even Moses himself had ever spoken in Israel as He spoke. Indeed, nobody could speak like Him; for He alone, being the Son of God, could speak "as one having power." He quoted the laws of Sinai one after another, as they are written in the Scriptures, not as they were being constantly perverted by the Rabbis. He introduced the precepts with the official formula: "It was said to them of old." He even pointed explicitly to the scene enacted on Mount Sinai. But, unlike Moses and the prophets, He did not add the phrases which they had to add: "Thus saith the Lord," or "The word of the Lord to Osee or Amos." With divine power the words rang out over the mountain-plain: "Thus has God told your fathers; but now I tell you . . ." He placed Himself on the same throne as the Divine Lawgiver who proclaimed the precepts on Mount Sinai. He announced the laws of the New Kingdom of God in His own name, thereby implying that it is His Kingdom and that He is God.

In His own name He not only laid down the conditions for belonging to the Kingdom of God, but declared that the final fate of all men is dependent on His recognizing them ("And then I will profess unto them, I never knew you" (7,23), and that the loss of eternal happiness is identical with being deprived of Him and His presence ("Depart *from Me,* you that work iniquity" (7,23). He stated that the Apostles whom *He* sent had the same dignity as the prophets whom *God* had sent in former times (5,12); that every man

who heareth *His* words and doth them, is safe for eternity (7,24), and everyone who disobeys them, incurs damnation, (7,27). No wonder the multitudes were astonished!

*Application.* Not even the Apostles will at that time have realized what dignity He claimed when speaking in these terms. We know what power He had when He went down into the innermost nature of man, when He determined the order of the world and the order of grace. Let us not stop at astonishment like the multitudes, but bend our knee before this power, and never forget that Omnipotence stands behind every word of the Sermon on the Mount. Hence, though Christ demands what surpasses our own unassisted weakness, He helps us with His omnipotence to carry out His behests. He demands no superhuman exertion, but only a reasonable effort.

III. THE MULTITUDES FOLLOWING HIM. "And when he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him." Since every human being is made by God for truth, truth always strikes a sympathetic chord in the deepest depths of the human heart. Man may go astray and reject God, but he will never be able to uproot from his soul the inborn hunger after truth, i. e., God. This hunger, if unappeased, will be his torture in hell. No wonder, then, that the multitudes were attracted when He spoke who as the Second Divine Person is truth personified in the strictest sense of the word.

Christ did not spare His hearers. He told them truths which are hard for the natural man. He neither

flattered them nor glossed over anything. He called good what is good, and bad what is bad. He opened their eyes to the full seriousness of the situation and to the fatal weight of the decision they had to make, either for or against Him. But what He said was true, and this was one reason why they accepted it.

But there was another reason. He spoke with that winning kindness which is all His own, and He explained the most serious truths in such a way that His hearers even in those strict demands could see the love, the care, the fidelity of the Father in Heaven.

Notice also how gently and considerately Christ acted the part of a reformer. How much was to be corrected in Israel, how many abuses had to be remedied! And yet He used no sarcasm and only once mentioned the Scribes and Pharisees. On the whole He was positive and constructive. He tactfully spared the susceptibilities of His hearers. Thus His message was the "Gospel," in old English "god spel," glad tidings. No wonder that great multitudes followed Him, as He came down from the mountain. Their enthusiasm was well founded.

*Applications.* 1) We serve a good Master. The multitudes realized this and, therefore, they followed Him. If only they had been willing to give up their prejudices and preconceived notions and to enter fully into the spirit of His doctrine! It is a privilege and the source of greatest happiness to follow Christ; but that privilege must be paid for by giving oneself entirely to Christ.

2) Christ's Sermon on the Mount has not lost its power. It contains the solution of all the troubles mankind groans

under to-day. Even infidels and Socialists see this. But they miss the basic and most important point, on which everything depends, namely, that faith in Christ, a total surrender to God, is necessary for carrying out the details of the Sermon. For making that total surrender grace is needed, and grace is given only to him who prays and receives the Sacraments. This is true also for us.

COLLOQUY. Give thanks for the light Christ has given us in the Sermon on the Mount. Resolve to live up to it, above all to the basic demand of total surrender to God and Christ. Pray for an ever increasing understanding of the doctrines of the Divine Teacher and for help to follow them. Pray also for the world, that the light which arose on the Mountain be seen and followed by many. "Enlighten them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, and direct our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1,79).

## Part II

### THE PROOF BY POWER

### Meditation 22

### "SHOW THYSELF TO THE PRIEST"

### (Matt. 8,2–4)

"And behold a leper came and adored him saying: Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus stretching forth his hands, touched him, saying: I will, be thou made clean. And forthwith his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus said to him: See thou tell no man but go, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them."

The Savior did not merely preach, but furnished abundant proof that He was entitled to speak as He did. Consequently, St. Matthew devotes the next chapters of his gospel to the task of proving how Christ by numerous miracles showed not only that, as a divine messenger, He had the right to preach, but that He is the Messias. Jesus Himself repeatedly declared that if the people did not care to believe His words, they ought at least to believe His works.

The first place among the miracles St. Matthew gives to the cure of a leper. The sufferer addressed Him with the firm conviction that He could and would help. He was not deceived, neither concerning the power nor concerning the kindness of Christ.

However, Christ intended by this miracle to secure more than the relief of the sufferer. He sent the leper to the priest, that the latter might pronounce him cured, admit him to the sacrifice provided by the law for such a case, and thus testify to the entire Old Testament priesthood and to all Israel that Jesus of Galilee had worked a great miracle, in other words, had been declared by God to be a divine messenger.

Let us ask for the grace that we may share the confidence of that leper, even though we have not seen Christ's miracles with our own eyes. Jesus is powerful enough to help in every trouble, even to cure leprosy, of the soul as well as of the body.

I. THE FAITH OF THE LEPER. "And behold a leper came and adored him, saying: Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." To this very day leprosy is one of the worst plagues that can befall man, and in the Orient the condition of such a sufferer is pitiable beyond description. The sufferings of a leper are described thus: Swellings appear in different parts of the body and break open, gradually covering the patient with malodorous wounds. His eyes water constantly, his hair and nails fall out, all strength is consumed and limb after limb is eaten away. His outward appearance as-

sumes a ghastly whiteness. In such a condition he lies outside the cities and villages at the roadside; for on account of the contagion he is segregated from society.

To this misery another was added among the Jews. Leprosy rendered the sufferer levitically unclean and excluded him from participation in religious worship. In other words, it placed him under what we should call the ban of major excommunication. One suspected of this disease had to be examined by a priest and, if the latter declared him unclean, had to wear torn garments, leave his hair unkempt and cover his beard with a veil. If somebody came his way, he had to give warning from a distance by shouting: "Unclean, unclean!" so that the person might not come near him. He had to live away from every human habitation. Should he be cured, the priest had to render him levitically clean with sacrifices and ceremonies, and until this had been done, he was not permitted to return to society.

From the other gospels and the manner in which St. Matthew speaks, it is evident that the fame of Christ's miracles had spread far and wide, even among the lepers. This was the reason why the sufferer whose case we are now considering, dared to break the strict regulations of the law concerning the distance he had to keep from all who were not afflicted with the disease, went into the midst of a crowd of men and prostrated himself at the Savior's feet.

He expressed his firm faith in Christ still more perfectly by what he said: "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." He was convinced that no human

misery, not even leprosy, could withstand the will of the great prophet.

*Applications.* 1) Here we have a direct witness of the kindness with which the Savior treated the people and that no lengthy speech was needed to secure help from Him. The ascetical writers tell us that we, too, not only may, but ought to, lay our troubles before Him in simple words, and that we need not employ long supplications. For if suffering is in itself a powerful appeal to human beings, who are able to help, what must it be for the Savior, whose heart is "the ocean of goodness" and whose power is unlimited.

2) The apostle must not kill, but promote the hope of the Christian laity in a supernatural intervention of God where natural means fail. But he ought to rouse in them also the spirit of resignation to God's will and the desire not to be heard if the favor asked for is not for the good of the soul. At the same time he ought to strengthen their conviction that if the Lord is not willing to remove the need, He will give the sufferer and those afflicted with him other graces and special helps to bear the trial. Is it not a matter of experience that the more fervently prayers are offered for relief from a cross, the more patiently is it borne, when not taken away? If the apostle improves his opportunity, he can help the soul even when he is unable to relieve the body.

II. THE MIRACLE. "And Jesus stretching forth his hand, touched him, saying: I will, be thou made clean. And forthwith his leprosy was cleansed." The leper has

not come to the Savior in vain. Jesus touches him with His sacred hands. Christ did not have to fear contagion. The sufferer has not even to ask for help in express words. The good Lord speaks the word of might in exactly the same form as that which the words of the man, so full of confidence, suggest: "I will, be thou made clean." That very moment every sore disappears. The body loses its sickening pallor, the disfigured features and partly consumed limbs recover a natural and healthy condition. All the bystanders are struck with awe at this exhibition of supernatural power. Thus Christ confirms the assertion of the sufferer that He has the power to cure him from this dreadful disease by a mere act of the will, and the implied confidence that He is only too willing to do so. Christ never disappoints confidence based on faith.

*Applications.* 1) Christ here proves Himself to be a Divine Person. For only God can cure disease by a mere act of the will. And yet, how many there are outside the Catholic Church who, though they call themselves Christians, deny His divinity. Let us make atonement for their want of faith.

2) Why does the Lord not work as many miracles today as when He was visible on earth? Perhaps the principal reason lies in the purpose of the miracles which He worked in such numbers while on earth. Their first and most essential purpose was to prove His divinity and establish His claim to men's faith. But in our case they could not serve the purpose of conversion to the faith, but

would principally serve a temporal end, the relief of bodily ills or the prolongation of life. This would make us too earthly-minded. Even at the great places of pilgrimage, as Lourdes, the principal favors obtained are not cures of bodily ailments, but spiritual graces.

Nevertheless, we, too, may count on the Savior for miraculous help in our necessities of body and soul. While it is true that He will not always help precisely in the manner we desire, we must understand and try to make others realize that He will help in the manner which is best for us.

III. THE COMMAND ADDRESSED TO THE LEPER. "And Jesus saith to him: See thou tell no man; but go, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift which Moses commanded for a testimony unto them." When the leper rose from his knees, perfectly cured, the Lord gave him an important order. The man was not to travel about and make his cure known, but to go to the priests, present himself for examination, and after the official decision offer the sacrifice prescribed by law. The Savior always manifested a conscientious care for the observance of the levitical law. Moreover, after His striking miracles He always either disappeared or imposed silence. This manner of acting was not only in accordance with His great humility and intended as a lesson for His followers, but dictated by admirable prudence. The Israelites, after witnessing His miracles, were anxious to proclaim Him as their deliverer from the Roman yoke and were confirmed in their worldly expectations. How necessary the precaution was in the

present case, we learn from the remark added by St. Mark. "But he [the leper] being gone out, began to publish and blaze abroad the word: so that he [Christ] could not openly go into the city [of Capharnaum], but was without in desert places: and they flocked to him from all sides" (Mark 1,45).

However, Christ's principal purpose in ordering the leper to show himself to the priest is expressed in the words: "for a testimony unto them," namely, the Jewish priesthood. The Lord in His public career never merely served the need of individuals, but always worked as the Savior of the world. If His miracles were to prove Him to be the Redemeer of mankind, it was necessary that their supernatural character be acknowledged officially. Now the authority which had to decide this was the Israelitic priesthood. The law of Moses gave them full directions for rendering a correct verdict.

*Application.* In faith the human intellect is rendered captive by divine revelation. But the sacrifice we must make to God of our highest faculties must be a rational sacrifice; we must know why we believe. On this account the Savior, when demanding faith, proved His claim by miracles.

These miracles were to lead to the faith not only those who witnessed them, but all men in all ages and places. St. Peter in his first Epistle demands that the Christian believer be ready to satisfy everyone who asks him for the reason of his faith and hope (1 Pet. 3,15). This demand is all the more important in our day, when we find

so many who read non-Catholic publications and begin to have doubts. It will not do, either in the pulpit or in the schoolroom or in private conversation, to silence the questioner by a brusque appeal to the authority of the Church. Nor was this the way the Apostles preached. They constantly referred to Christ's miracles, above all to the greatest among them, His Resurrection. We must explain to the man of to-day the absolutely invincible force of these miracles. Jesus of Nazareth claimed to be not only a divine messenger, but a Divine Person, the Son of God; He worked miracles in confirmation of His claim, and, as a final proof, said He would be killed by the Jews, but rise again on the third day. His claims cannot be false, for if He was not God, not He, but God, the infinite truth and holiness, would have wrought these wonders and thus given divine sanction to the worst liar and impostor the world has ever seen; God would have positively led all well-meaning people into the most baneful error and a most shameful idolatry.

COLLOQUY. Acts of faith in Christ's divinity; prayer for an increase of faith for ourselves and others. "Rabbi, we know that thou art come a teacher from God; for no man can do these signs which Thou dost, unless God be with him" (John 3,2).

## Meditation 23

### "I HAVE NOT FOUND SO GREAT FAITH IN ISRAEL"

### (Matt. 8,5–13)

"And when he had entered into Capharnaum, there came to him a centurion, beseeching him, and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, and is grievously tormented. And Jesus saith to him: I will come and heal him. And the centurion making answer, said: Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man subject to authority, having under me soldiers; and I say to this, Go, and he goeth, and to another, Come, and he cometh, and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. And Jesus hearing this, marvelled; and said to them that followed him: Amen I say to you: I have not found so great faith in Israel. And I say to you that many shall come from the west and the east, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven: but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into exterior darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And Jesus said to the centurion: Go, and as thou hast believed, so be it done to thee. And the servant was healed at the same hour."

Not only the leper, who was a Jew, but also the pagans who lived in Palestine learned to know Christ's power of working miracles, by this knowledge came to believe in Him and placed confidence in Him. A splendid example of what an unprejudiced mind saw in His miracles is furnished by the centurion of Capharnaum. He asked the Lord to cure his "orderly," and immediately obtained the latter's promise of a visit. But the captain considered himself unworthy to receive the celebrated wonder-worker in his house. Moreover, he reasoned it was not necessary for the Lord to take the trouble of going to the patient. This was a correct conclusion, but no Jew had so far drawn it. Thus this pagan was far in advance of all the Israelites as regards faith. The humble faith of the pagans represented by the Roman officer and the proud infidelity of the Jews, according to Christ, are the reasons why the Gentiles will take the place which was first intended for Israel.

Let us ask for the grace of that practical faith which makes us realize that the only end of our earthly existence is the service of God.

I. THE ROAD TO FAITH. "And when he had entered into Capharnaum, there came to him a centurion beseeching him, and saying: Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, and is grievously tormented." The apparent contradiction between the accounts of St. Matthew and Luke can best be solved by explaining that the centurion first sent a delegation of Jews to request the Savior in his name; but before they brought

back Christ's answer, he himself went to see the Lord. Possibly, in his great reverence for the wonder-worker he believed that, as a pagan, he needed an introduction by Christ's co-religionists. The latter would seem not only to have added the praise of the gentile's character and good deeds in behalf of the Jews, but also on their own authority to have made the further request that Jesus visit the centurion's house.

No personal affliction induced the centurion to approach Christ, but the great sufferings of his orderly. Many reasons might have kept him back. He was a man in a higher position and such a person does not like to appear as a suppliant. He was a pagan and without doubt well informed about the opinion the Jews had of pagans. Consequently, he might well have doubted whether Jesus would listen to him. The words of the ancients, whom he sent to intercede for him, seem to point to such thoughts.

But compassion with his suffering servant, respect for the religion of Israel, the high opinion he had of the Savior, his soldier-like, manly bearing made him take the right step without hesitation. He had carefully considered all he had heard about Christ; and the kindness with which the latter was ready not only to cure the patient, but to pay a visit to his house, did not fail to make a deep impression on him. Thus he came to that splendid faith which won the praise and admiration of Jesus.

God offers the gift of faith, but man must be disposed to receive it, and above all must not neutralize

the initial grace by pride, selfishness, and a base bent of mind. The centurion can serve as a model. First of all, he was fully conscious that he was asking for a favor which he had no right to demand. Nevertheless, he did not hesitate to approach the Lord; for he was convinced of His kindness. Again, he acknowledged Jesus as a person high above him and as one who had power to help where every other means failed. Moreover, though a pagan, he respected the religious views, customs and obligations of the Jews and evidently knew that a Jew became levitically unclean by entering the house of a gentile. All this and the truly humane sentiment which he manifested for a mere slave, rendered him fit for the Kingdom of God. How narrow-minded and low were the Jews in comparison with this man!

*Application.* The same dispositions of humility, sincerity, and confidence towards God, and of charity towards men, are necessary not only for the beginning of faith in the convert, but also for an increase in the spirit of faith in those belonging to the fold, including the religious and the priest. Intellectually proud, selfish, and insincere souls draw little benefit from their faith. It takes humility, sincerity, and unselfishness to find consolation and strength in the great doctrines concerning Heaven, the sufferings of the Savior, the necessity of penance for our sins, the Eucharistic presence. Even spiritual persons must ask the Lord to increase in them the practical realization of the revealed truths, and they must prepare themselves for this grace by the practice of the virtues which we admire in the centurion of Capharnaum.

II. THE CENTURION'S FAITH. "Jesus saith to him: I will come and heal him. And the centurion making answer said: Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man subject to authority, having under me soldiers; and I say to this, Go, and he goeth, and to another, Come, and he cometh, and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it." The Lord in a way seems anxious to go to the house of the captain and work the miracle. This is one of the only two instances recorded in the gospels in which Christ expresses readiness to go to a sick person's house and openly says He wants to work a miracle. The other we find in the resuscitation of the daughter of Jairus. Nothing shows the faith of this pagan officer better than the request that the Lord do not trouble Himself to come to his house, and the reasons with which he supports the request that He effect the cure by a mere word. "O Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof." The carpenter's son too great and dignified to enter the well-furnished home of a Roman officer of rank? Yes; for the centurion sees more clearly than the Israelites. He beholds in the humble preacher a prophet of God, whose dignity is supernatural and rooted in his very soul, while he himself has only a mere external title. If he, as centurion, can by a mere word force his will on all the men under his command, the great prophet can by a mere word force His will on diseases and the agents which cause them.

A person so holy and so supernatural need not go to the trouble of coming to his house.

Consider also the manner in which the centurion expresses his thoughts. It is the direct and simple, but expressive language of the military man, and it proves that the speaker is not only fully convinced of what he says, but considers his actions in no way as extraordinary. For him it is a matter of course to try to get help for his orderly and he cannot see anything great on his part in asking the holy prophet for help; it is equally a matter of course for him when he acknowledges the dignity of Christ and considers himself unworthy of being honored by such a visitor; a matter of course also that he must save the Lord the trouble of entering the house of a gentile and contracting a levitical impediment; a matter of course, too, that he tells Jesus how a word of His spoken at a distance is equally effective as a personal visit.

*Applications.* 1) Only one who has an exaggerated idea of his mental powers can believe that it is humiliating to acknowledge that God knows infinitely more than man, that the Infinite Majesty contains mysteries which no finite intellect can fathom. It is very profitable for us to realize that the motive of our faith is the infinite knowledge and truthfulness of God and that our mental powers are extremely limited. If we always looked upon the world and upon life with the eye of faith, we should never be in doubt about our duty, even when we are confronted with great mysteries or when we have to submit to the

authority of the Church in matters of faith and discipline. Humble faith is above all required where the Church makes us repeat the words of the centurion: "O Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof."

2) It is only the humble, straightforward faith of the centurion which draws the last conclusions from revealed doctrines and applies them to practical life. And yet, these applications are necessary for the priest and the religious. For otherwise there will remain in us much that is faulty and useless for our last end. But this faith is possible only if self is obliterated and God is allowed to rule us.

III. THE INFIDELITY OF ISRAEL. "And Jesus, hearing this, marvelled and said to those that followed him: Amen I say to you, I have not found so great faith in Israel. And I say to you that many shall come from the east and the west, and sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into the exterior darkness; and there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." The Jews, according to Christ, cannot complain if their entire nation is ruined by their infidelity. They have witnessed with their own eyes the same miracles as the pagan centurion, probably even greater ones. If they sufficed to convince the pagan, why should they not be sufficient for Israel?

It is true, the Jews, as members of the chosen people, are the born citizens of the new Kingdom of God. But this external connection with the Messias, this external destination for the Kingdom of God, is by no means

enough; every one must make actual use of the privilege. To judge from merely external conditions, it should be easy for the Jews to find the true faith and, by following Christ, to gain entrance into this Kingdom. But woe to them who miss it! Even though born citizens, they will be expelled from the marriage-feast and cast into the outer darkness, where they will weep and moan over their loss and gnash their teeth in their rage against themselves and against those who came from all parts of the earth to take their places with the holy patriarchs. Israel remains in infidelity, while the people of the East and the West believe and are saved. This is the meaning of the "exterior darkness." Participation in the Messianic Kingdom is in more than one place compared to a marriage feast; marriages in the Holy Land were celebrated at night, and those who were excluded from the festive hall were compelled to go into the darkness without.

*Application.* No mere membership in the Church or in an ecclesiastical state guarantees salvation. It offers graces in abundance, but these graces must be used properly; otherwise they only increase responsibility. Nay, the abundance of the graces offered to the members day after day, can cause the danger of forgetting to evaluate them properly, of considering them one's due and of minor importance, and thus of failing to make a faithful and conscientious use of them. This will surely happen if we let our natural inclinations have a word to say in judging them, if we lack courage to perform our duties as we see them in the light of faith. These defects creep in very

easily and it requires serious meditation and examination of conscience combined with prayer to guard against them. May Israel be a constant warning and the centurion an elevating example for us.

IV. JESUS DOES NOT ENTER THE CENTURION'S HOUSE. "And Jesus said to the centurion: Go, and as thou hast believed, so be it done to thee. And the servant was healed at the same hour." Many of us at first may experience a feeling of disappointment that the Lord did not enter the house of the centurion in spite of the latter's protest. But Jesus never forgot His vocation as the Savior of the world and, whilst kind to individuals, always considered the general good and the "greater glory" of God before everything else. Now the miracle and its power of convincing the world was greater if He healed the patient at a distance. This seems to have been the first time that He cured one who was not present to Him. Had He gone to the sufferer, the faith of the centurion might have seemed exaggerated to the Jews.

Secondly, Christ was sent first to the children of the house of Israel and had to look to their interests. For them it was better that He cured the man without going to the sickroom.

And finally, here we have an instance of what we may call the noble susceptibility of our Lord, a trait in His character and work with which we shall meet repeatedly. He never flattered the rich nor showed them special favors. He entered their houses only when He

was invited and there was some necessity for doing so. He preferred the poor. He realized that a divine messenger easily forfeits his independence by associating with the wealthy, while the poor and humble are timid about approaching an apostle who moves in higher circles.

*Application.* Let us not overestimate the effects which the conversion of a rich or distinguished person produces for the Church. The rich and distinguished need the Church, but the Church does not need them. She would be the Church of Christ without them, but not without the poor. Let us be above all apostles of the poor.

COLLOQUY. Petition for an open heart and a sincere mind, ready to accept God's graces and inspirations. "Enlighten my eyes that I may never sleep in death" (Ps. 12,4).

## Meditation 24

### A MULTITUDE OF MIRACLES

(Matt. 8,14–17)

"And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother lying, and sick of a fever: and he touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she arose and ministered to them. And when evening was come, they brought to him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word: and all that were sick, he healed: that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken by the prophet Isaias, saying: He took our infirmities, and bore our diseases."

The last words of this passage show what was the Evangelist's purpose in selecting the miracles so far recounted. They prove the thesis of his gospel in more than one way. The cure of St. Peter's mother-in-law and of so many sufferers before Peter's house is also symbolical in as much as it showed Israel and the world where to find the Redeemer and what position the Apostles held.

Let us ask for the grace of a lively faith in Christ as our Redeemer.

I. THE CURE OF THE MOTHER OF PETER'S WIFE. "And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother lying, and sick with a fever: and he touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she arose and ministered to them." The difficulty raised by some who maintain that St. Peter had broken all connections with his family, is easily solved. There were different phases in the call of the Apostles, from their associating with the Savior at first only occasionally up to their final and absolute relinquishment of all worldly concerns and the total severance of their family ties. The miracle recorded here occurred during the second phase of their vocation, when they devoting more, but not all, of their time to the service of Christ, occasionally returned home to ply their trade. It was on one of these visits that Christ cured Peter's mother-in-law.

Entering the house, Christ found the patient in a severe fever. According to St. Luke, the disciples besought Him for her (4,38). Acceding to their request, the Lord went to the patient, touched her hand and commanded the fever to leave her. Whereupon she rose from her sickbed so perfectly restored to health that she was able immediately to take up her household duties and minister to the guests. The Lord not only banished the ailment, but restored her strength so that she was able to prepare a repast for the large company assembled in her house. By their successful intercession in her behalf the Apostles began their own work in performing miracles; it foreshadowed the power which they would receive of healing diseases in the name of

Jesus. How firm their faith was made by this cure we can gather from the fact that the very same evening crowds of sufferers of every description congregated before Peter's house, seeking relief and finding it.

*Applications.* 1) Jesus must be our trusted helper in the needs of those with whom we live or for whom we have to work. Our motto must be: "For me to live means Christ" (Phil. 1,21). But how could we bring Christ to others if we were not filled with Him? It is a good practice to devote part of the time we spend before the Blessed Sacrament to speaking to the Savior about the needs of those for whose welfare we are concerned. This helps them and brings us nearer to Him. And when our prayers are heard, the favor must confirm our practical faith and our love for Him.

2) The example of Peter's mother-in-law restored to health shows us what we ought to do when we have received a favor from Christ, namely, minister to Him and to others for His sake. Christ insists on gratitude, as we shall see later on.

II. HE HEALS ALL SUFFERERS. "When evening was come, they brought to him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word: and all that were sick he healed." What a sad multitude assembled before Peter's house that evening! St. Mark tells us that the entire city was there. St. Luke adds that Christ imposed His sacred hands on each sick person separately; He did not, however, touch the demoniacs,

but drove the devils out by a mere word. However, every sufferer obtained full relief. It will be well to dwell at some length on this beautiful scene.

By these miracles the Savior evidently intended not only to prove His Messianic dignity, but also to impress on the people the truth that He was to be found only in the company of His Apostles. That night all who wanted to see Him, had to come to the house of the future head of the Church. The multitude had become accustomed to seek Him in the circle of His disciples, who were not only destined to be the official witnesses of His words and deeds, but to participate in His power.

*Applications.* 1) The Christian people in their needs turn to the priests and religious. We are priests and religious for the poor, the troubled, the oppressed; they need the Savior most. We have the power to console and help by some means or other in every need and suffering. We have the power of healing sick souls, which is incomparably higher than the gift of miraculously healing the ills of the body. Let us spare neither time nor trouble to exercise it.

2) Christ is to be found only in the company of the Apostles. From the very beginning He seems to inculcate the truth that not only do they possess full knowledge of what He does and teaches, but likewise that until the end of time we must seek Him, His doctrine, His spirit, His graces from the Catholic hierarchy. The greater the Saint, the more devoted and obedient is he to ecclesiastical superiors. Our spiritual progress and the success of our

work for souls depend on the conformity of our ideas, sentiments, and plans with the spirit of the Church. This spirit is made known to us by those who have the power to teach and govern. Even when bestowing the greatest privileges upon His Saints on earth, or commanding them to undertake great things for God and souls, He always refers them to the hierarchy. The spirit of the twentieth century, even among Catholics, is one of growing independence from authority in thought and action. And yet, as Christ intimated to some of the Saints whom He has favored with special visions, the individual even in this case may be mistaken by falsely interpreting His words or by unconsciously adding to what he has been told or made to see. How much more necessary is it, therefore, for those not favored with special divine communications, to submit to the regularly constituted authority.

III. CHRIST AND THE PROPHETS. "That it might be fulfilled, which was spoken by the prophet Isaias, saying: He took our infirmities, and bore our diseases." Isaias, in foretelling the characteristic marks of the Messias, mentions that He will heal all the infirmities and diseases of His people. Moreover, time and again the prophets give as a sign of the Redeemer the fact that He puts an end to suffering. Now any one who was not prejudiced, could find out on the evening of the Sabbath that the Messias had appeared and dwelled in Peter's house, conferring blessings on such a large scale and of such diverse nature as no prophet had ever done before. Moreover, He was not working His miracles as they did. They made great efforts and pleaded with God

to obtain the cure of but one person; He worked His miracles with the greatest ease, by a mere touch of His hand or a few words, as one who called omnipotence His own. And in all this, the people who witnessed the scene before Peter's house experienced the impression which the personality of Christ always made on those present.

We may explain the fulfilment of Isaias' prophecy also in another way, which is preferred by some interpreters. Disease and all the other sufferings of this world are the result of sin. Hence only he can free men from them who either has received from God the power to remit sins because he has rendered full atonement for them, or who, in consequence of mere supplication, or for some other reason, is commissioned by the Almighty to be the mediator in an act of pure divine mercy, or who is God Himself. The prophets of the Old Testament at times worked their miraculous cures by interceding for the sufferer; on other occasions they as well as the Apostles and the Saints of the New Testament acted as mediators of divine mercy. They, moreover, exercised a miraculous power only in rare cases and thus showed that it did not reside in them habitually, precisely because they neither were divine beings nor could render full atonement for sins. Christ, on the contrary, worked cures constantly and thus showed that He possessed this power as His own. The reason why it resides habitually in Him is not only that He is God, but that He "took our iniquities upon Himself," and suffered for us the punishments due to our sins,

"our infirmities and our diseases." Therefore, He is the Messias.

*Application.* Whilst in a way we are at a disadvantage concerning the efficacy of that evening in Capharnaum, when we compare ourselves with the eye-witnesses, in another regard we enjoy a positive advantage over them. They had only more or less obscure prophecies to guide them, for us these predictions become clear in their fulfilment, and we can trace their execution. We see not only the miracles of Christ and the Apostles, but the miracles wrought in every century to this very day. We constantly behold before our eyes that uninterrupted miracle of Christ, the existence, preservation, and work of the Catholic Church.

How grateful must we be for having been called not only to the true Church, but also to a state which gives us the full enjoyment of the Redemption. Let us show our gratitude by working zealously for Christ and His Church.

COLLOQUY. Make acts of faith in Christ; thank Him for having time and again healed you from sins, bad habits, imperfections, discouragement; also for having called you to His Church and the state to which you belong. Entreat the grace of a vivid realization of your belonging to Him; protest undying loyalty to Him. "Jesus, for Thee I live; Jesus, for Thee I die; Jesus, Thine I am in life and in death."

## Meditation 25

### CHRIST'S DEMANDS

### (Matt, 8,18–22)

"And Jesus seeing the great multitudes about him, gave orders to pass over the water. And a certain scribe came and said to him: Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou shalt go. And Jesus saith to him: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. And another of his disciples said to him: Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus said to him: Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead."

At the height of His fame Christ withdrew from the enthusiastic crowds and went to Gadara on the other side of Lake Genesareth. But before entering the boat which was to carry him across, He told a scribe, who wished to become a disciple of His, what he had to expect as such, and peremptorily refused one who was already a disciple permission to stay behind to "bury his father." The significance of these occurrences lies in this that Jesus wanted to make known to all His disciples, to those who at that time were already His companions and to those who would be their future

successors in the work for which they were destined, what He would demand of them and what He positively would not want. We might call this pericope a declaration of principles made for Christ's disciples.

Let us ask for the grace of being able to make the sacrifices required by our vocation.

I. CHRIST WITHDRAWS FROM THE MULTITUDES. "And Jesus seeing the great multitudes about him, gave orders to pass over the water." The Evangelist, not without a purpose, interrupts his account of Christ's miracles to insert a declaration of principles given by Christ not in words but by actions. Time and again we see Our Lord withdrawing from the multitude after performing a striking miracle, and thus apparently spoiling a good opportunity. But in reality that seemingly good opportunity contained a danger to His cause. The enthusiastic crowd looked upon those miracles as a confirmation of their worldly ideas and expectations concerning the Messias, later on even as on an opportunity to force Him into setting Himself up as king of the world. In the present instance they saw in Him merely the wonderful physician, who could cure ills and free men from every trouble demoniacal possession included. But such a person He neither was nor wanted to be. Therefore, He withdrew from sight and gave the people a chance to let their worldly zeal cool down. He wanted souls submissive to God, not people for whom religion was only a means to be freed or preserved from the ills and woes of this life, and to ob-

tain a goodly share of earthly prosperity. More miracles at that time would have been detrimental to His cause.

*Application.* Let us not encourage the idea that religion is hardly any more than a means to be freed from earthly troubles and to secure temporal blessings. Our Divine Savior did not assume human nature for such a purpose. We certainly ought to have recourse to God and to teach people to apply to Him also for earthly favors, but only in as far as they help to serve God more efficiently. For such graces we must pray conditionally only. When somebody is inclined to give up prayer and religious practices because his wish for a temporal blessing has not been granted, he shows thereby that he shares the notions of the Jews, from whom Jesus withdrew.

II. EARTHLY AIMS. "And a certain scribe came and said to him: Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou shalt go. And Jesus saith to him: The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." What motives prompted that scribe to seek admission among the Savior's disciples? He may have been induced by religious considerations; but he may also have had worldly aims. Christ's was known all over the land as a wonderful Rabbi and a person endowed with preternatural powers. His cause seemed to have a future. If the position of a Rabbi's disciple always was very desirable, what prospects were not held out to a disciple of this great teacher and wonder-worker!

Whatever may have been in the mind of this ap-

plicant, Christ saw Himself compelled to let him know what His followers had to expect and on what conditions one might aspire to the dignity of a disciple. If that man sought merely a distinguished position and an easy life, he was promptly undeceived. If he were acting from genuine religious motives, he had to be taught what sacrifices he would have to make. He was told that a disciple of Christ was expected to lead a life like that of the Master, who, in spite of constant hard work, could not call enough property His own to be assured of a place of rest for the next night. "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." Even animals had more comforts than He. Hence, as far as this world was concerned, Jesus promised nothing but sacrifices.—We do not know what became of that scribe.

*Applications.* 1) Every disciple of Christ at times will find that His service is hard work without respite. When, after the toil of a busy day, he considers himself entitled to some rest, he will be required to do still more. Let us not complain, but willingly make the sacrifices required of us. Our state is one of self-abnegation, but this constant self-denial will bring us nearer to God and establish the Kingdom of God much more firmly within us.

2) The Savior will always take care that His servants do not perish from want. But one who intrudes himself into His service for earthly ends, even if it be only to obtain a livelihood or a home, desecrates a holy state.

What will Christ tell him? The blunt reply to the scribe allows us to conjecture the answer to this question.

This applies not only to our vocation in general, but to offices and positions, and to all our work. We must never seek an earthly reward, but only that which begins when the "Requiem aeternam" is sung over our remains.

III. EARTHLY TIES. "And another of his disciples said to him: Lord suffer me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus said to him: Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead." His answer to the scribe proves that Christ does not permit His holy cause to be exploited for earthly ends. And He does not permit it to be injured by earthly ties and regards. With His disciple everything else must yield to the demands of his state and vocation. This truth that disciple was made to realize who asked the Savior's permission to go and bury his father. While the answer to the scribe was very explicit, that to this man, who was already a disciple, was almost shockingly harsh.

Commentators advance diverging explanations of this passage. This remark applies, however, only to the answers given to the question about the particular reason why Jesus refused permission and to the question what the disciple meant by "burying his father." Let us adhere strictly to the text and not go any farther than the obvious sense of the words permits.

It is evident that Christ did not abolish the fourth commandment. On the contrary, He sharply rebuked the Pharisees who violated and, for all practical purposes, abolished it by their so-called "Traditions

of the Ancients." But there are higher duties than those enjoined by the fourth commandment, namely, all those directly referring to God. When a conflict occurs between different duties, it is the law of reason as well as of revelation that the higher duty must prevail.

For a better understanding of this passage it will help to consider a law which God gave in the Old Testament for the high priests and the Nazarites. The latter were men and women consecrated to the special service of God, either for a specified time or for life. In Leviticus (21,10 f.) and Numbers (6,7) these persons were prohibited, under pain of losing their consecration and becoming unclean, to attend any funeral or go near a dead body, even if the deceased was their own father or mother, brother or sister. The world may consider this enactment harsh; but the same world does not condemn anybody who, for the purpose of improving his financial condition, emigrates to a far distant country and thus, for the sake of temporal advantages, renders himself unable to attend the funerals of his nearest relatives. If such a step is justifiable in the service of the world, it cannot be wrong when the service of God requires it.

The man in question, as a "disciple," had special duties in the service of Christ and, as the context shows, was obliged to go with his Master. On the other hand, he had also obligations towards his father. The Gospel does not tell us how the conflict between these two kinds of duties arose. The disciple could not accompany Christ across the lake and "bury his father," be

it that, he was to take care of his aged parent until the latter died or—what is the more probable explanation—that he was to attend his funeral.

Moreover, from the Lord's answer it is certain that there were others who could well assume the duty which this man wished to perform in person. For when Christ said: "Let the dead bury their dead," He did not want corpses to perform the work of undertakers and mourners. Therefore, those who were to assume the duty of the son, were dead in another sense. Now Christ often spoke of a new life and of a "higher" or "abundant" life which He was bringing to mankind. By the former He meant the life of faith infused into the soul through Baptism and energizing itself in the practice of the ordinary Christian virtues; by the latter the life of perfection consisting in the universality, firmness, and ease of the habit of perfect charity which is striven after above all by observing the evangelical counsels. This higher life people in the world, as a rule, do not possess, and for this reason they may be called "dead" in a certain sense. The wavering disciple was called to this higher life. Christ, therefore, commanded him to leave the care of his father to his brothers and sisters. He, as the author and supreme Lord of all duties and rights, had the power to dispense this man from his obligations towards his father and insist on his duties as a disciple. After all, by refusing permission "to bury his father" the Savior did not demand more of the man consecrated to His special service in the New Testament than the Mosaic law required

from persons belonging to a similar state in the Old.

Note the ingenious play on the word "dead." The Lord could not have expressed the situation in more pregnant terms. Time and again He sums up entire treatises of theology in one brief phrase. Thus when He calls Peter "the rock," He gives us *in nuce* the whole tract on the Supremacy of the Roman Pontiff; and when He styles Himself "the Vine" and His faithful the "Branches," He summarizes the entire doctrine of supernatural grace.

*Application.* Here again we learn a very important lesson from the Savior Himself. Whosoever is called by Him to a higher state of life, must, in case of a conflict, place the obligations and demands of this state above all others. The Savior here speaks not only of those who have been called by Him to the religious life, but of all who have to take part in His office of saving souls.

What then must be the judgment of Christ about a disciple who places personal relations or other natural considerations above the obligations of his state of life? He who thinks it hard to die to this world for the sake of Christ and to let the world be dead to him, is not permitted to become a priest or a religious. God's rights precede all others, and the disciple of Christ must always acknowledge and defend them.

COLLOQUY. Acts of gratitude for having been called to the dignity of a disciple of Christ; for the particular care He takes of us; for all the occasions on which, perhaps against our will, He has forced us to live up

to the dignity and the detachment essential to our vocation. Acts of sorrow for our want of detachment and generosity. Petition for strength to make the sacrifices of a life required by our vocation completely and without reservation. "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal. 6,14).

## Meditation 26

### CHRIST'S POWER OVER THE ELEMENTS OF NATURE

(Matt. 8,23–27)

"And when he entered into the boat, his disciples followed him. And behold, a great storm arose in the sea, so that the boat was covered with waves, but he was asleep. And they came to him and awaked him, saying: Lord, save us, we perish. And Jesus saith to them: Why are you fearful, O ye of little faith? Then rising up he commanded the winds, and the sea, and there came a great calm. But the men wondered, saying: What manner of man is this, for the winds and the sea obey him?"

The key-note of this pericope is found in the last words. Christ made extraordinary demands, not only of men, but also of nature, as when "He commanded the winds and the sea" to be calm. The selection of miracles which the Evangelist makes for His gospel shows that he wishes to prove how the Savior not only had the power to command, but could enable those whom He commanded to obey Him.

Let us ask for the grace that we, who know the answer to the question of the awe-stricken Galileans, may be filled with such confidence in Christ that in our in-

terior and exterior distress He is not compelled to tell us: "Why are you fearful, O ye of little faith."

I. THE APOSTLES IN DANGER. "And when he entered into the boat, his disciples followed him. And behold, a great storm arose in the sea, so that the boat was covered with waves. . . . And they came to him, and awaked him, saying: Lord, save us, we perish." By Christ's order the Apostles got ready to cross the lake with Him. According to St. Mark (4,35), it was evening when they set out. St. Matthew's Greek text is more emphatic than the Douay version, stating that "a great commotion arose on the sea"; St. Mark (4,37) and St. Luke (8,22) use the Greek term which signifies "a hurricane with clouds and thick darkness." When Christ set out from Capharnaum, there was most probably no indication of the coming gale, the like of which often arises very suddenly on Lake Genesareth. That body of water is known for its sudden and dangerous squalls, which rush down from the mountains through the valley of the Jordan and with great violence fall upon the lake and churn it to the bottom. This is precisely what happened that night, and what the Lord knew would occur. Suddenly all the elements were in a seething turmoil and the waves rose so high that the boat at times entirely disappeared amidst the mountains of water and soon was rapidly filling.

The Apostles had, so to say, grown up on the lake and struggled often enough with the gales and waves. They lacked neither strength, nor skill, nor courage.

Yet now they gave themselves up for lost. The Master was quietly sleeping on a cushion, possibly in a little cabin of the boat, undisturbed by the roar of the hurricane and the pitching of the vessel. Frightened to death, they now waked Him with the despair of drowning men: "Lord, save us, we perish!"

*Application.* The disciple of Christ, even when busily executing the Master's behest, does not always sail with the sun shining, the air clear and balmy, the sea even and smooth, and all the means for orientation easily discernible. Many of the dangers and obstacles that threaten him he can overcome by his own efforts, his training and experience. But he must also face situations in which his resources give out and his experience and skill prove insufficient. Happy is he who, in such hours, has the Master in his boat, because he can honestly say that he has incurred the danger only because he was busy in Christ's service and acted upon His command.

II. THE LORD DURING THE TEMPEST. "But He was asleep. . . . And Jesus saith to them: Why are you fearful, O ye of little faith? Then rising up He commanded the winds, and the sea, and there came a great calm." What a contrast between the riot of the elements, the anxious shouts of the Apostles trying to make themselves heard above the roar of the wind and waves, and their panic-laden expostulation with the Master on one hand, and, on the other, the calmness of the Savior, who was undisturbed by all the noise and commotion. He had perfect control over His body as well as His soul.

But there is much more to this scene. Even when the disciples shouted to Him for help, His first concern was their spiritual welfare. Therefore, before quieting the hurricane and smoothing down the waves, He first calmed the storm raging in their hearts. He let His own superior calmness and security work on their minds and feelings. For this purpose He did not rise immediately to His feet, but, retaining His position of rest, smiled at them and said in His own kind manner: "Why are you fearful, O ye of little faith?" Their faith had still to grow considerably until it reached the height required in an apostle. Once it had attained its fullness, they would understand that even in the proximate danger of death there was no reason to be fearful as long as He was with them.

After thus gently quieting their excitement, He rose up and let them see with their own eyes why He was right in calling their faith "little." He stood erect and firm in the pitching and tossing boat and calmly and majestically "commanded the winds and the sea, and there came a great calm." He worked two miracles, stilling the hurricane and smoothing down the raging billows. At His word, instantly the profoundest calm reigned on the sea and in the air, and the stars reappeared in the sky, which a moment ago was covered with thick clouds.

*Application.* Here we see the Savior not only in His power, but in many wonderful traits of His character. He is a kind master and a wonderful pedagogue. Nothing

could better show His power to the Apostles than a miracle on the lake, with whose perils they were familiar. Nothing could make them realize His superiority more clearly than the quiet dignity and, we might almost say, the good-nature with which He met those excited sailors amidst the roar of the elements. Had He risen immediately and stilled the waves without first addressing His Apostles, at least half the impression He wanted to make on them would have been lost.

This, then, is the lesson to be learned: fearlessly perform the duties which God imposes upon you, no matter whether men or the powers of nature threaten. We are in God's hand and, therefore, we are safe. Death or earthly loss will not overtake us unless God wills it, and to die at the time appointed by God, to suffer a loss decreed by Him, are great blessings. We must only be certain that we are where He wants us to be and do our duty.

III. THE EFFECT OF THE MIRACLE. "But the men wondered, saying: What manner of man is this, for the winds and the sea obey him?" When Christ placed His Apostles in this great peril, He not only intended to strengthen their confidence, but He wanted to lead them a considerable step farther in the knowledge of His person. For this reason He let the danger rise so high that even though they were perfectly at home on the lake, they saw every natural means of rescue gone. Nothing is imprinted more indelibly on man's mind than what he experiences when he peers into the darkness of death. Therefore, the Apostles were not to be mere witnesses of how others were saved, but they

were to experience Christ's power in their own persons in a moment of utter despair.

Moreover, nothing was more apt to give them a true idea of Christ's supra-human power than this turmoil of the elements. A man from whom danger threatens, can be softened by pity or paralyzed by fear; but tempests and waves know neither fear nor pity. A disease can unexpectedly take a favorable turn; but we realize how little our weak arm can do against the blind and deaf elements of nature. If, therefore, Jesus could check and crush them with one word, there was more in Him than weak human nature. Consequently, with natural necessity the question was forced upon the lips of those men who often enough had realized their powerlessness against the elements: "What manner of man is this, for the winds and the sea obey him?" It was as yet a vague suspicion. But there was progress in knowledge; for they realized at least that Christ was more than any of the prophets of whom they knew; for none of the prophets had ever commanded the winds and the sea. "What manner of man is this?" The answer was given later by Peter in the name of the Twelve.

*Applications.* 1) We know that answer. Let us make acts of faith and adoration. We do not want to repeat what St. Peter erroneously exclaimed when he received the first faint idea of the dignity of Christ: "Lord, depart from me, for I am a sinful man" (Luke 5,1 ff.). Let us say: Lord, stay with me, for I am a sinful man. I

need Thy help, when the tempests threaten from without or from within me. Oh, then say to the wind and to the sea: "Be silent!"

2) The twofold miracle of stilling the storm and smoothing down the wild billows again shows how the Savior adapts Himself to the men He has before Him. Here is a miracle the greatness of which nobody can estimate as accurately as the fishermen of Galilee, who are familiar with the fury of that inland lake. This again must fill us with great confidence in His guidance.

3) We also see here the manner in which the Lord likes to bestow special favors; first a trial, a sacrifice, and then grace, sudden help, great joy. When the Apostles were in the midst of the hurricane, they would have wished to be anywhere else rather than in that dangerous predicament. But later they would not have wished to have been spared that awful experience, in view of the wonderful grace and the feeling of security which they always had in the help of the Master after that memorable night? Every cross is a preparation for a new favor.

COLLOQUY. Acts of adoration of Christ, the Lord of the elements; of confidence in His power and kindness and in the wisdom of His guidance; of petition for this confidence. "Though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evils, for thou art with me" (Ps. 22,4).

## Meditation 27

### CHRIST'S POWER OVER THE DEMONS

(Matt. 8,28–9,1[a])

"And when he was come on the other side of the water, into the country of the Gerasens, there met him two that were possessed with devils, coming out of the sepulchres, exceeding fierce, so that none could pass by that way. And behold they cried out saying: What have we to do with thee, Jesus Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time? And there was, not far from them, a herd of many swine feeding. And the devils besought him saying: If thou cast us out hence, send us into the herd of swine. And he said to them: Go. But they going out went into the swine, and behold the whole herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea; and they perished in the waters. And they that kept them fled: and coming into the city, told everything, and concerning them that had been possessed by the devils. And behold the whole city went out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart from their coast. And entering into a boat, he passed over the water."

In reporting the miracle which the Lord worked for the two demoniacs of Gerasa or "Gadara," as modern commentators prefer to call it, the Evangelist intends

to illustrate Christ's power over the forces of the lower regions. We gather from it also valuable information about the malice and cunning of the evil spirits, about the impressions Christ and everything supernatural produce on the minds of worldly people such as the Gadarenes, and the conduct of Christ in case His graces are unwelcome to men.

Let us ask for the grace that we may always be loyal to the Conqueror of hell, in order to escape the power of the devil and be safe against his attacks.

I. IN THE POWER OF THE EVIL ONE. "And when he was come on the other side of the water into the country of the Gerasens, there met him two that were possessed with devils, coming out of the sepulchres, exceeding fierce, so that none could pass by that way. And behold they cried out saying: What have we to do with thee, Jesus Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" As the gospel accounts show, cases of demoniacal possession were frequent among the Jews at the time of Christ. Man, by sinning, puts himself into a state of slavery and the demon rules in him instead of God. God sometimes permits the devil to take possession of man's body, use it as his instrument, and reign in it like a second soul. But all the work of the demon in those possessed is destruction, perversion, and horror.

The demoniacs of Gadara had their lair in the homes of the dead, which men as a rule pass with aversion and horror. They were the terror of the whole region. As

St. Mark tells us (5,1 ff.), they cut their chests with stones, ran around and howled, and attacked everyone that passed by. They possessed superhuman strength, for they broke chains like threads. When the demons addressed Christ as "Jesus, Son of God," they certainly did not know that He was the Son of God in the sense in which we know Him to be such; but they were sure that He was more than an ordinary mortal and, as the commentators say, stooped to low flattery in order to escape castigation by Him.

*Applications.* 1) Even now Satan has not been deprived of all his power. St. Peter admonishes us: "Be sober and watch: because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5,8).

Sobriety and watchfulness are all the more necessary because Satan has numerous powerful and cunning accomplices in many human beings around us, and the strongest one in our corrupt nature. What is this sobriety? It consists in a hardy, well-regulated and mortified life. The easy-going, comfort-loving person falls easily a prey to the onslaughts of the devil. Moreover, we must be vigilant in controlling our senses, watching over the emotions of our heart, ruling our imagination and our thoughts, circumspect in speaking and acting, reserved in dealing with others, and we must avoid undue familiarity, especially with persons of the other sex.

2) When we see the malice of the devil, we must feel pity for those who are exposed to it. No sacrifice can be too heavy, no evil too hard, no hour too unseasonable for

saving them from his snares or to wrest them out of his clutches.

II. CHRIST'S POWER OVER HELL. "And there was, not far from them, a herd of swine feeding. And the devils besought him saying: If thou cast us out hence, send us into the herd of swine. And he said to them: Go. But they going out went into the swine, and behold the whole herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea; and they perished in the waters." The devil and his influence in the world is no pious figment or childish superstition; the manifestations in those possessed show it too clearly. But how great must be Christ's power, when He conquers these terrible spirits with one word! When He appeared on the shore, the two demoniacs rushed towards Him whining and groaning. The evil spirits in them felt the presence of the Mightier One and tried to defend themselves against His mastery, which they had to acknowledge against their will. If forced to relinquish their human habitation, they begged leave to stay at least in low animals. Even for this they needed Christ's permission.

He granted their request, not for their own sake, but for the sake of the people around Him, above all for the sake of the Apostles. The power of the demons, according to the more commonly accepted view, did not show itself in this, that they drove the whole herd of about two thousand swine into the lake. It would rather seem that the demons preferred staying in those unclean animals rather than to be forced back into hell. The

commentators say that the influence which the spirits exercised on the swine was so disagreeable even to them, that they rushed into the water to find relief, and thus perished.

*Applications.* 1) "What manner of man is this whom not only the winds and the sea obey," but before whom those powerful spirits tremble? On the lake the Savior showed that He is exalted above all men, because He can command the elements, against which man is powerless. But what is the power of the elements compared with the uncanny power of the devils, of Lucifer, whose natural powers are so great that he dreamed of erecting his throne beside that of the Most High God? We go through the entire visible world, the whole realm of the spirits and all orders of creatures, and nowhere find Christ's place. It is above the places of creatures, on the throne of God. Let us make acts of faith and adoration. The spirits of darkness repeat in our day what they did when they called Him the Son of God. This title in their mouths was clumsy flattery. The mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation are the object of their greatest hatred, while they have no objection to a pantheistic god. There is something uncanny as well as ungrateful in the attempt of the modern world to make Christ a mere man and the son of god in a pantheistic sense.

2) We must be zealous in preaching not only the divinity of Christ, but His dignity as Son of God. Unhappily not a few Catholics speak as though there were no Three Persons in God and confound the notions of God and God-Man. God and Christ is the same for them. And yet,

the glory of Christ consists in being the Son of God the Father. Catechists and teachers of religion should not tolerate expressions like these: "In the Blessed Sacrament we receive God." Christ is true God, but He is not the only Divine Person. Essential for Holy Communion is the fact that we receive the body and blood of Jesus Christ and that it is a union with the God-Man. The better this is understood, the greater will be the faith, the reverence, the love people have for Him.

III. CHRIST REQUESTED TO WITHDRAW FROM GADARA. "And they that kept them [the swine] fled: and coming into the city, told everything, concerning them that had been possessed by the devils. And behold the whole city went out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart from their coast. And entering into a boat, he passed over the water."

Strange people, these Gerasens. The Evangelist very explicitly tells us that the men who tended the herds ran post-haste into the city and reported not only the loss of the animals, but all the details about the casting out of the demons; that immediately "the whole city" was in commotion and "went out to meet Jesus," not like a grateful multitude to thank Him and welcome Him to their city, but like a host of frightened burghers anxious to avert a great public calamity. St. Mark adds that they saw the demoniacs "sitting quietly and well in their wits." Thus they became eye-witnesses of Christ's heavenly power and of their deliverance from the worst plague which had been afflicting city and

country. However, all they saw and heard, caused not a ripple of gratitude in their hearts, but only abject fear. They had lost two thousand pigs; would they not lose more if Jesus tarried in their midst? And then, here was a man endowed with supernatural powers,— "a prophet," whose presence is always gruesome and disagreeable to worldly-minded persons. Steeped in earthly things, they rather lost the Son of God and Heaven than earth and wealth. "They asked him to depart from their coast," i. e., to leave their country, and Jesus complied with their wish.

*Applications.* 1) God has given man a liberty which is truly appalling. Man can decide his own fate. It needs more than clear proofs to arrive at a living faith. The foolish heart, steeped in the things of earth, blinds the intellect. Man, even if his reason has no subterfuge, can show God the door, in order to establish himself comfortably on this earth. Good will and an unconditional surrender are needed, coupled with firm trust in the goodness of God, who will never render us miserable. This is true not only of any sacrifice made in His service, but of the submission of one's judgment to those who have the right to guide one. Scrupulous and anxious souls must apply this truth to every decision given by their spiritual director; independent minds to regulations of superiors; self-willed persons to orders and arrangements made by those who have the right to give directions.

2) The worldling feels uncomfortable and horrified in the presence of the supernatural. God has become such a

stranger to him, and earth has such charm, that a call from Heaven grates upon him like a dissonant chord. Therefore, we religious must not make ourselves too comfortable on earth. Ascetics teach that if our life is not uncomfortable in itself, we must render it so, in order that we may not forget God and Heaven. This is done by following a daily order in which duties and other good works are performed at the time appointed by superiors or chosen by ourselves, and not left to the mood of the hour, by being regular in acts of mortification, and by courageously accepting the inconveniences and humiliations which come our way.

COLLOQUY. Acts of homage to Christ, the King and Conqueror of hell; of gratitude for having been delivered from the slavery of Satan; of petition that we may escape the power and snares of the devil. "Deliver not up to the beasts the souls that confess to thee: and forget not to the end the souls of thy poor" (Ps. 73,19).

## Meditation 28

### CHRIST'S POWER, GOD'S POWER

(Matt. 9,1$^{b}$–8)

"And he came into his own city. And behold they brought to him one sick of the palsy lying in a bed. And Jesus, seeing their faith, said to the man sick of the palsy: Be of good heart, son, thy sins are forgiven thee. And behold some of the Scribes said within themselves: He blasphemeth. And Jesus seeing their thoughts, said: Why do you think evil in your hearts? Whether is easier, to say thy sins are forgiven thee: or to say, Arise, and walk? But that you may know that the son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then said he to the man sick of the palsy), Arise, take up thy bed, and go into thy house. And he arose, and went into his house. And the multitude seeing it, feared, and glorified God, that gave such power to men."

In this account we see the power of Christ at its climax; for He forgives sins *in His own name,* which is an act of God's supreme dominion. He shows this by a special miracle. The manner in which the first proof of this power is received by Israel, is more terrible than the petition of the Gerasens. The Scribes

immediately formulate their verdict: "He blasphemeth." The miracle does not seem to have any effect on them. On the people the power of forgiving sins appears to make no impression. But they have at least so much of an open mind as to "praise God that gave such power *to men.*" They can not see more than a man in Christ.

We ask for the grace that the meditations on the miracles of Christ may not leave us silent or effect merely an unprofitable pleasure of the mind, but deepen our faith in Him as our God and the Savior from sin.

I. JESUS FORGIVES SINS. "And He came into his own city. And behold, they brought to him one sick of the palsy, lying in a bed. And Jesus seeing their faith, said to the man sick of the palsy: Be of good heart, son, thy sins are forgiven thee." The scene described in this passage occurred months before the stilling of the storm and the delivery of the demoniacs of Gerasa. The Evangelist inserts it here to bring out a climax. The power over the demons surpasses that over the elements; but the power to forgive sins in one's own name surpasses both, because God by the former binds creatures, but by the latter Himself.

A. THE FAITH OF THE CARRIERS. The Lord was again at Capharnaum, "His own city," His home during His public life, after the Nazarenes had driven Him away. Wherever He was known to be, they always brought the sick to Him. This time, whilst He was in-

structing the multitude, four men brought, on a stretcher, a patient sick with the palsy. According to St. Mark (2,1 ff.), they carried him to the top of the house, uncovered the roof and let him down.

*Application.* How frequently is it necessary for everyone who has the care of a soul committed to him, to carry it spiritually to Christ and remove the obstacles which seem to prevent its cure. He must act with the same caution as that which is necessary to carry a palsied man to the top of a Palestinian house and let him down. This work is as important as any other spiritual ministration.

B. CHRIST'S POWER. "When Jesus saw their [the carriers'] faith," as St. Mark says, thereby insinuating the pleasure of the Sacred Heart caused by this noble action, He was ready to do much more than these compassionate men expected of Him. The ailment from which the man suffered was a punishment for his sins, and his soul was in an even worse condition than his body. Christ, therefore, gave him such powerful graces that he was disposed for perfect conversion and pardon. The man co-operated with grace and, therefore, the Lord was able to say to him: "Be of good heart," i. e., have courage and confidence. He added a word of endearment, by addressing him as "son," and thus assuring him that He harbored for him the love of a benign father. Then He spoke the most consoling word He could address to any sinner: "Thy sins are forgiven thee." The whole world is compelled to believe

that this soul, once blackened by great crimes, now shone in immaculate whiteness.

But Christ's work of grace extended much farther than that. By forgiving the sins of that man, He revealed Himself to the world as the offended, but merciful and forgiving God, and as a Divine Person, come for the purpose of pardoning all sinners.

To take away sins is the ultimate end of Christ's coming. It was the reason why He attracted men by His miracles and benefits, traveled through Palestine, and announced the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of grace.

Christ did not merely give exalted moral precepts. He stretched out His hand to the fallen, so that they could rise again and, strengthened by His grace as well as instructed by His doctrine, walk in the ways of God. As the angel told Joseph, He is "Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1,21).

This grace far surpasses all the bodily cures obtained from Him. It is the root of all other blessings. Sickness and death are temporal consequences and punishments of sin. Jesus has come not only to cure the temporal consequences sin has wrought in man's body, but to heal the soul and make it strong for eternal life.

*Applications.* 1) Let us thank Him for the inestimable blessing that He has made forgiveness of sins possible. Let us try to realize the extent of this grace. Let us conceive a worthy idea of the Sacrament of Penance and approach it with great confidence, love, and gratitude.

2) Let us renew our hatred against sin and make a firm resolution to avoid it. Let us try to understand that no evil of the body, not even the most painful ailment, can be compared with sin. Diseases and death were taken away by the prophets and Saints of God; many ailments can be removed by natural means. Sin can be removed only by the God-Man.

II. THE SCRIBES ACCUSE CHRIST OF BLASPHEMY. "And behold some of the Scribes said within themselves: He blasphemeth. And Jesus seeing their thoughts, said: Why do you think evil in your hearts? Whether is easier, to say, thy sins are forgiven thee: or to say, Arise, and walk? But that you may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins (then said he to the man sick of the palsy), Arise, take up thy bed, and go into thy house. And he arose, and went into his house."

The assembled multitude must have waited for this external miracle with great eagerness; for Christ's consoling words about the forgiveness of sins can hardly have been understood by them in their full meaning. But the words were not to be lost; the manifestation of Christ's divinity was to become clear to all. The adversaries of the Lord and their very unbelief had to serve this purpose.

Among the people there were quite a number of Scribes. These representatives of Israel's religious views, these custodians and interpreters of the revelations of the Old Testament, discussed the most pointed questions in their schools. Therefore, they understood

the claim which Jesus made by authoritatively forgiving sins. He not merely declared that God had forgiven them, as the prophets were wont to do; no, He forgave them in His own name. The concrete circumstances under which Christ spoke, and which are not mentioned in the written account, made it clear to the Scribes that Christ wanted to be understood as forgiving sins on His own authority, not as a representative of God. This we see very clearly from what follows. St. Mark tells us: "And there were some of the Scribes sitting there, and thinking in their hearts: Why doth this man speak thus, he blasphemeth. Who can forgive sins, but God only? Which Jesus presently knowing in his spirit, that they so thought within themselves, saith to them: Why think you these things in your hearts?" (Mark 2,7.8). In the following words Jesus confirms their opinion that God alone can forgive sins, and then proceeds to show that He has this power and, consequently, that He is true God.

He accepts without objection their idea that "no one can forgive sins except God alone." For sin is an offence against God and an offence can be forgiven only by the offended person himself. Therefore, by claiming this power, He would be guilty of blasphemy only if He did not possess this right and consequently, only if He were no Divine Person. Therefore, He immediately proves by a deed that the right and power of forgiving sins is His and thus that He is God.

No human eye can see the effect of His forgiving sins. But for a mere man it is equally impossible to

heal that palsied man by a mere word. Everyone who is not tongue-tied, can say with the same ease: "Thy sins are forgiven," and "Arise and go into thy house." But to say the word which has power to effect what it expresses, is deemed harder among men when a visible effect is to be produced; for they think material results more difficult to produce than spiritual ones. If, however, Christ's words possess power, they have it for an invisible effect as well as for a visible one. For if He cannot pardon sins in His own name, then God cannot lend Him the power of healing the palsied man when He appeals to this miracle as a proof that He can forgive sins on His own authority.

And now He gives the proof. He first addresses the Scribes: "But that you may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins." He makes it clear for all future ages that the real and principal purpose of this miracle is to prove His power to forgive sins like Yahweh. Then He turns to the patient, who lies helpless before Him, and says: "Arise, take up thy bed and go into thy house." Immediately the man does as he is told. Christ wants to show that not only the sickness is gone, but strength is restored and the cure complete; therefore He bids the man to carry his bed and walk home.

Here we see Christ's power at its climax. He proves that He possesses not only omnipotence, but that supreme divine dominion which is required for pardoning sins. He has not only the powers, but the rights of God.

*Applications.* 1) When His demands of self-abnegation become very practical for us, we may retain the theoretical faith in His divinity, but lose the practical life-giving conviction. When He requires a sacrifice, the only thing for us to do is to strengthen our faith in His divinity, our confidence in His power and help, our love towards our Divine Leader, and then make it in the name of God.

2) How patiently does the Lord take the insult contained in the verdict of the Scribes! Israel never grants Him the favor of the more kindly explanation of His words and deeds when more than one explanation is possible. Need we be surprised if, at times, our best intentions, our most innocent words, our kindest deeds are misjudged? "The disciple is not above his master." "Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make our hearts like unto Thine."

III. THE EFFECT ON THE MULTITUDE. "And the multitude seeing it, feared, and glorified God, that gave such power to men." The people took from the palpable miracle only what they anxiously and curiously expected. "They feared," that is to say, they were frightened by Christ's serious words to the Scribes; they felt vaguely that something really great had happened. Yet they very quickly forgot the real question at issue, because their desire for a noisy demonstration of rejoicing found a welcome occasion in the cure of the palsied man. They "glorified God that gave such power to *men*." They neglected the God who was in their midst, looked up to God far enough away in Heaven

above, and rejoiced only over the unheard of power He had given to men; but less, if at all, over the power to forgive sins, mostly, if not exclusively, over the power to cure the sick bodies and work impressive, interesting, and entertaining wonders. For them Jesus remained "the man," who could help them in their physical troubles and give them a grand entertainment by doing what was never done before. No wonder then, if after a short time their old leaders, for whom Christ was a blasphemer, triumphed over this superficial and shallow sentiment and dragged the multitude along to cry with them: "Crucify him!" Their noisy enthusiasm promoted only a mixture of false religiousness and baneful nationalism.

*Applications.* 1) Never is Christ and His cause served by mere external pomp, parading external membership in the Church and vaunting the temporal benefits which Christ and His Church confer on mankind. How easily can that external rejoicing and that captivating show conceal the want of genuine, thorough devotion to Christ and lack of a really Catholic life. We certainly must arrange external festivities and public demonstrations in honor of Christ the King, but only as means to an end, namely, the increase of a life according to His teaching. Christ is first of all the Savior from sin and the author of a new life.

2) The Lord shows no impatience, although He meets here with an egregious failure. We too meet with failures and great disappointments in our work and must

bear them like our Savior, knowing that the great seal certifying something as God's work is the cross.

COLLOQUY. Acts of faith, adoration, atonement, oblation, and consecration to Christ; of petition for a lively faith in Him, our God and Redeemer. "My Lord and my God!" (John 20,28).

## Meditation 29

### THE PHYSICIAN OF SINNERS

(Matt. 9,9–13)

"And when Jesus passed on from thence, he saw a man sitting in the custom-house, named Matthew; and he saith to him: Follow me. And he arose up and followed him. And it came to pass as he was sitting at meat in the house, behold many publicans and sinners came, and sat down with Jesus and his disciples. And the Pharisees seeing it, said to his disciples: Why doth your master eat with publicans and sinners? But Jesus hearing it said: They that are in health need not a physician, but they that are ill. Go then and learn what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice. For I am not come to call the just, but sinners."

The chief purpose determining St. Matthew to speak of this event in the Savior's life is found in Christ's answer to the Pharisees. The Evangelist wants not only to record the history of his own vocation, but to tell the Israelites for what purpose the Savior really came into this world and why His conduct and general attitude was so different from that of their beloved Pharisees.

Let us ask the Divine Physician for the grace that we confidently show Him our faults and place ourselves in His hands, even to burn and cut, convinced that He will resort to painful treatment only when necessary; and for the grace to learn from Him to have pity on others whose physicians we are appointed to be.

1. THE VOCATION OF THE PUBLICAN. "And when Jesus passed on from thence, he saw a man sitting in the custom-house, named Matthew; and he saith to him: Follow me. And he arose and followed him." The gospel of St. Luke (5,27–39) and the address of St. Peter before the election of Matthias (Acts 1,21.22) show that the events of this pericope occurred before the Sermon on the Mount. They seem to have been introduced here first of all to complete the argument by answering some objections raised by the Jews, and secondly, to let the readers know that the Evangelist, as an eye-witness to what he narrates, is absolutely reliable.

Those who stand condemned in public opinion are not always the worst men. Common opinions are least justifiable when the religious element in them is but a cover for some kind of pride and undue self-esteem, or when they proceed from a feeling of an imagined violation of rights and privileges. No state as such makes man good or bad. It may even happen that untoward conditions and circumstances force a man of noble dispositions into a very questionable position. Jesus certainly took care that the activity of His

Apostles should not be rendered null and void from the beginning. Nevertheless, He did not hesitate to draw a publican directly from the custom-house into the circle of His Apostles, although the whole class of men engaged in this business was in bad repute. He was not disappointed in Matthew: the former publican energetically took up Christ's cause and defended the interests of His Lord and of the nascent Church most effectively by writing his gospel.

*Applications.* 1) If great sins have occurred, they are to serve only as a stimulus to atone for the past by greater zeal. It is true that the evil habits to which an aspirant to the priesthood or religious life was addicted, must have been thoroughly overcome before he can enter these states. But if this is the case, it is a very specious and treacherous temptation, to lose courage and confidence at the thought of past sins. It is still worse to attribute temptations which the Lord permits after virtue has become stronger, to past sins and to consider them a punishment for offences long ago repented of and atoned for. Why should God allow one in good faith to choose the state of Christ's special service, to bind himself by holy orders or sacred vows, to carry the yoke of the Lord in peace for years, and then suddenly punish him by depriving him of His grace and help?

2) Frequently there is a danger lest we be influenced in our opinion of others or in judging about a pious undertaking or any other religious affair by one-sided notions and party-judgments, which have not even an iota of the religious element in them. Christ certainly was

very far from sharing the false religious and nationalistic prejudices of the Jews, although the Pharisees tried to justify them by the religious position of their nation. Let us always keep national susceptibilities out of the sphere of religion and not think of political adversaries as the Pharisees judged the publicans.

3) Nobody was better acquainted with the divine origin of the Old Testament and the unique character of the chosen people than our Savior. But He now showed that it was not justifiable to stamp as an attempt upon God whatever the Jews felt as oppression, not even if the measure was unjust in itself. God often enough used the pagan nations for punishing the infidelity of Israel. In this case it frequently happened that while the actions of the pagans were wrong, the majesty of Yahweh was not attacked by them in spite of the fact that the Jews were His chosen people. Likewise priests and religious are not justified in mixing their temporal interests with their dignity or the sacred rights of the Church, and trying to take revenge for a merely secular injustice by religious measures or considering a merely personal offence as an attack upon religion.

II. ASSOCIATION WITH SINNERS. "And it came to pass as he was sitting at meat in the house, behold many publicans and sinners came, and sat down with Jesus and His disciples. And the Pharisees seeing it, said to His disciples: "Why doth your master eat with publicans and sinners?" St. Matthew gave expression to his joy over the grace he received by being called to the service of Christ, and prepared a banquet for the

Master and his new companions. Our Savior very readily accepted the invitation for Himself and His disciples, and thereby approved the whole arrangement. In spite of His holy seriousness and His vocation as Redeemer, He was no enemy of natural and innocent pleasures. He appeared at the festivity not in a stiff and formal manner, with a faulty show of asceticism, but readily entered upon the sentiments which animated the new Apostle and his company. He was not kept back by the fact that numerous officials and colleagues of the erstwhile publican attended, though He knew that He scandalized the Pharisees and called down their hostility upon Himself. This hostility was not slow in coming. But the Pharisees did not venture to attack the Savior in person, they had made sad experiences in the past; they questioned His disciples, unlettered Galileans, concerning the conduct of their Master.

*Applications.* 1) Let us admire the kindness which Christ shows here and remember that it is the same to-day. Let us also practice that unselfish charity which He manifests by sharing and, in His own way, contributing to the joys of others. We can do so by accepting a kind service and by not minding merely Pharisaical scandal and censure, when it is a question of winning souls.

2) The Pharisees dared not attack the Master in person; but they molested His disciples who were not yet a match for them and whom they hoped to browbeat. This was mean cowardice, to which a servant of Christ should

never stoop. It is not honest to complain to a subject about his superior's doings unless the former is able to effect a remedy. It is never right to complain to a young person about his parents.

III. THE SAVIOR OF SINNERS, NOT OF THE JUST. "But Jesus hearing it, said: They that are in health, need not a physician, but they that are ill. Go then and learn what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice." Christ, though He would know the cowardly attack the Pharisees made on His Apostles, even were He not near by, purposely approached so as to hear what they were saying, and immediately took up their defence. After all it was not the Apostles whom the Pharisees wanted to strike, but Him. Assuming, but not granting, that His enemies were right in passing their harsh judgment on the company assembled in Matthew's house, He told them in the plainest terms that, as the Physician of souls, He had to seek the company of sinners. But at the same time He castigated their unbounded pride with fine sarcasm. "They that are in health need not a physician, but they that are ill." These "saints" in Israel thought that their souls were in the best possible condition and by no means needed the help of God or His Messenger. Next He reminded them of the doctrine of Scripture that God places mercy above all external religious practices. "Go then and learn," what a stinging rebuke! You, who imagine that nobody can teach you anything about the Sacred Scriptures, show yourselves woefully ignorant

in an important point emphatically inculcated in the Holy Book.

*Applications.* 1) In these words the Lord lets His enemies and the world know why He meets the publicans and sinners at the banquet. Even if He cannot convert them immediately, He can at least try to prepare their conversion by kind words and deeds. We must never repulse sinners, even if they come with intentions which have no relation to conversion. We may justly refuse to waste time on people who are not great sinners and who approach us only for purposes foreign to our state and insignificant in themselves; but with sinners we must be doubly careful and courteous.

2) In consequence of original sin and our own personal offences we are all ill and need the Divine Physician. The Saints felt this need most keenly of all; they did not exaggerate when they spoke so frequently of their numerous faults and moral weakness. More than ordinarily enlightened about the holiness of God and the true nature of moral imperfections, they always sought the help of the Divine Physician. Let us go to Him, not in despair and discouragement, but with humility and confidence in His mercy. Let us be convinced that our vocation on earth is not to be self-satisfied and self-conscious paragons of holiness, but eternal monuments of divine mercy. Here, too, it is true that God's mercy is above all His works.

IV. CHRIST ONLY FOR SINNERS. "For I am not come to call the just, but sinners." Christ referred the Scribes

to the prophet Osee who said, speaking in the name of God: "I desired mercy, and not sacrifice: and the knowledge of God more than holocausts" (Osee 6,6). Yahweh in these words tells the Israelites that what He wants of them most of all, is kindliness, mercy, and that He rejects all external worship when deprived of these sentiments. But in the words proposed now for our consideration Jesus goes a step farther and at the same time gives another reason why He associates with sinners, and a new lesson of humility for all those who wish to serve Him. He is not come to "call," that is to say, "to bring to God," "the just, but sinners." By the just He understands those who trust in their imagined holiness or in a kind of natural virtue they may possess, or who forget that they are sinners, in as much as they still suffer from the consequences of original sin, and who think that they can keep their souls free from sin without the help of Christ. We may find in these words also a bitter sarcasm directed against the Pharisees, who "trusted in themselves as just, and despised others." (Luke 18,9).

*Applications.* 1) Christ does not leave uncorrected the harshness of the Pharisees, who are always ready to excommunicate their fellowmen. God Himself, to show mercy to us sinners, demands from us mercy towards other sinners, not harsh rejection, which is an outgrowth of pride. Christ demands that we do not treat them with Pharisaical severity and Jansenistic rigor, but, with mildness in judging and compassion for their sad state, and that we help them, if possible. Let us never forget that

but few sin from malice, many from ignorance, most from weakness.

2) As Christ, so His apostle, is come to call the sinners, not the just. Even the worst sinner must have easy access to him. The physician must devote the greatest care and devotion to those who are suffering most and whose condition is critical. Not the best behaved pupil, not the most patient sufferer in the hospital, not the most manageable subject, but the wayward pupil, the patient who is not resigned, the subject who is hard to deal with, need the best effort.

3) How wrong is it to stay away from Christ after having committed a serious fault! To go to Him is here on earth not a reward for virtue, just as to call upon a physician is not the privilege of the strong and healthy, but a right conferred on the sinner by God Himself. This applies first of all to the frequent reception of Holy Communion. Let us thoroughly do away with the false Jansenistic error that Communion is a reward of virtue; it is first of all a remedy against sins and the passions. The more we realize our imperfection and unworthiness, the greater ought to be our desire to receive Holy Communion. The same principle applies to prayer, to visits of the Blessed Sacrament, and all practices of piety.

But some will object: "Do I not commit more sins by appearing before the Lord? I cannot pray; I only add to my sins if I appear before the tabernacle." Tell them: "Is a patient afraid to go to the physician because he is disfigured by disease or covered with blood, or because weak-nerved persons cannot look at him?" If one cannot tell our Lord much nor work up pious senti-

ments, one ought to remain in His loving presence and let Him speak.

COLLOQUY. Acts of gratitude for the mercy and love of Christ towards us sinners; of petition for confidence in His kindness, for understanding His conduct towards sinners, and for help to win sinners. It is "a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners, of whom I am the chief" (1 Tim. 1,15).

## Meditation 30

### RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

### (Matt. 9,14–17)

"Then came to him the disciples of John, saying: Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but thy disciples do not fast? And Jesus said to them: Can the children of the bridegroom mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then they shall fast. And nobody putteth a piece of raw cloth unto an old garment. For it taketh away the fullness thereof from the garment, and there is made a greater rent. Neither do they put new wine into old bottles. Otherwise the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish. But the new wine they put into new bottles: and both are preserved."

The question asked by the disciples of John the Baptist, why Christ and His Apostles did not observe the semi-weekly fasts of the Pharisees, gave our Lord an opportunity for clearly stating that His mission was not to revive Old-Testament piety, but to introduce a new and nobler spirituality. We may call this passage a declaration of principles.

Let us ask for the grace to understand how we are to practice the freedom of spirit which Christ teaches.

I. THE DEMAND. "Then came to him the disciples of John, saying: Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but thy disciples do not fast?" John the Baptist was sent by God to prepare the people for the appearance of the Savior by his sermons and example of penance. For this reason his disciples kept the customary fasts of the Pharisees, every Monday and Thursday. But this pious exercise was not obligatory. Therefore, nobody could compel others to join in it; and it was wrong to make it the standard by which to determine the religious condition of individuals and societies of men. Yet the narrow and domineering spirit of Pharisaism could not see how real piety was possible if it did not follow its forms.

Now the Savior came as a professed reformer. He surrounded Himself with disciples, whose life to a certain extent was to be the impersonation of His religious principles. But it lacked the Pharisaical practices. This was a scandal for the representatives of Pharisaical holiness, and John's disciples felt called upon to question the Lord about it.

*Application.* True religious life in a priest, a religious, and even a lay person, besides the exercises prescribed by God and the proper authorities, also requires other practices not enjoined by law. We call them pious customs. These customs are either universal, or particular (peculiar to a country, a society, or a class), or merely private and

personal. Whilst they are a great help if observed in the proper spirit, they are useless, nay, harmful if they become mechanical and merely external acts without the proper spirit; still more so, if they are considered more important than solid virtues; and worst of all, if they are used to excuse faults and neglect of duty. Moreover, when strictly personal practices foster pride and hypocrisy, when they prompt one to despise everybody that does not observe them, they are Pharisaical in the worst sense. Everybody is free to choose any private practices which are reasonable and helpful to him; but he must leave the same freedom to everybody else, and never make mere custom the only or the principal standard of holiness. For himself, moreover, he must not become such a slave to his system and practices that he is afraid to omit, change or even discard them entirely when they stand in the way of a greater good.

II. CHRIST'S REFUSAL. "And Jesus said to them: Can the children [attendants] of the bridegroom mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then they shall fast." The Savior took up the defence of His Apostles. The Baptist within the hearing of these very questioners had called himself the friend of the bridegroom, who had to bring the bride to him. Already in the Old Testament the work of the Messias during His earthly sojourn was compared to a wedding with nuptial celebrations. The bride whom John was to lead to the Messias was mankind in general and Israel in particular. The attendants of the bridegroom were the Apostles. The brief period of

Christ's public career was the wedding feast announced by the prophets. God wanted this short time to be a period of holy rejoicing. But fasting is a species of mourning, and, therefore, out of place at a marriage-feast. Moreover, the Jewish law expressly exempted the persons attending it even from the fast imposed by the Mosaic code if the nuptial celebrations coincided with it. Therefore, according to the words of their own master, the disciples of John could not demand that the Apostles should observe the Pharisaical fasts. Observance of this penance implied the denial of Christ's Messianic dignity.

But the Savior by no means excluded fasting forever from the religious practices to be observed in His Church. He added that the days of the marriage-festivities would soon be over; the bridegroom would be taken from their midst; then the time for mourning and fasting would come also for His disciples, and they would fast.

*Application.* Piety is necessary at all times, but different times demand different forms. As sunshine and rain must alternate to preserve and promote life on earth, so joy and sorrow, consolation and desolation, difficulties and easy times must change off in spiritual life. Constant sunshine wilts the plants, constant rain drowns them. Theoretically we accept these truths, but in practice we often deny them. God knows best how to distribute joy and sorrow; we must accept both as He sends them. Let us gratefully enjoy divine consolations and rejoice when the Church re-

joices; but also willingly accept the cross and practice mortification in the right manner.

III. THE TWO PARABLES. "And nobody putteth a piece of raw cloth unto an old garment. For it taketh away the fullness thereof from the garment, and there is made a greater rent. Neither do they put new wine into old bottles. Otherwise the bottles break and the wine runneth out and the bottles perish. But new wine they put into new bottles: and both are preserved." Besides dismissing the complaint of John's disciples, the Lord by means of two parables gave them and the Pharisees leagued with them, an axiomatic lesson about His position towards Old-Testament piety.

No experienced person would think of mending a rent in an old garment with a piece of newly woven cloth. For the new cloth shrinks when wetted, and washing clothes was a frequent occurrence among the Palestinian Jews. The old fabric cannot resist the pulling of the strong and shrinking new piece, and thus one gets only another and bigger rent. Likewise nobody would think of putting young and fermenting wine into old and brittle leather bottles. Leather tubes were used in the Orient to keep liquids. The force of the fermenting wine would burst them, and both the wine and the bottles would be lost. New wine needs new bottles.

The religious spirit defended by John's disciples was the old garment which the Lord did not want to

mend with a patch of the new cloth of His religiousness; and the new wine was the new religious spirit which did not fit into the old leather bottles of the religious forms prevailing in Israel. Both would have been ruined, the spirit of Christ and the observances of the Old Testament. The Lord absolutely refused to mix the religious practices of the Old Testament with the spirit of the New Dispensation. He came, not for a revival of Old-Testament piety, but to organize a new form based on a complete change in men's relation to God.

Christ refused to cast the Kingdom of God in the moulds of Mosaic religiousness; for they did not fit the proportions and designs of the New Testament. Here we have an explanation why Protestants, who devote more attention to the Old than to the New Testament, must complain about the decrease of religiousness.

*Applications.* 1) There are many details which can be altered according to the varying persons and times, while the unchangeable spirit of Christianity is left untouched. It would be wrong to adhere rigidly to old methods and forms when conditions have changed. The Church in this regard has always shown a wonderful adaptability. But if changes are advisable, it is not the part of subjects to introduce them, but of the authorities. Alterations made on private responsibility are often but palliated or unconscious insubordination and as such may do great harm. This truth is of wide application. Let us point only to one. At times new devotions spring up, receive perhaps even the ap-

proval of some local authority, and later on are condemned by Rome. And even if approved by the pope, they do not become a general obligation. From the approbation it does not follow that they should be foisted on everybody.

2) Changes in our personal and private devotions and practices may at times be useful, nay, even necessary. But they must be made prudently, with the advice or approval of those who have the direction of our conscience.

COLLOQUY. Acts of gratitude for the lessons received in this meditation; of atonement for the insult offered to Christ; petition for the apostolic broad-mindedness of the Savior. "I became all things to all men, that I might save all" (1 Cor. 9,22).

## Meditation 31

### CHRIST'S ATTRACTIVENESS

(Matt. 9,18–26)

"As he was speaking these things unto them, behold a certain ruler came up, and adored him saying: Lord, my daughter is even now dead; but come, lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live. And Jesus rising up followed him, with his disciples. And behold a woman who was troubled with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him, and touched the hem of his garment. For she said within herself: If I shall touch only his garment, I shall be healed. But Jesus turning and seeing her, said: Be of good heart, daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour. And when Jesus was come into the house of the ruler, and saw the minstrels and the multitude making a rout, he said: Give place, for the girl is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn. And when the multitude was put forth, he went in, and took her by the hand. And the maid arose. And the fame thereof went abroad into all that country."

The two miracles narrated in this passage agree in this that they concern entirely desperate cases and thus furnish an illustration of Christ's power and the reputa-

tion which He enjoyed at this period. Another peculiar feature is that only the direst need brought Jairus and the woman to the Savior. But He made them overcome the fault which kept them away from Him so long. Jesus is shown here at the apex of His fame.

Let us ask for the grace to banish all timid reserve towards Christ, but seek His presence in all our needs, spiritual as well as temporal.

I. NEED LEADS TO CHRIST. The Evangelist now resumes his account of the miracles wrought by Christ. Jairus, as president of a synagogue and a distinguished Pharisee, would never have appealed to the Savior, had he seen another way to save his daughter's life. For this step disgraced him in the eyes of the leading classes. The woman, afflicted with that humiliating disease, for twelve years had gone from physician to physician, submitted to every barbarous treatment used in those days, and spent her entire fortune, but all in vain. Both knew about the miracles Christ had been working for about two years. It was only need and despair that now directed their steps to Him. Neither of them seems to have intended to become an open adherent of Jesus, even though helped by Him. We may say that the woman wanted to steal a miracle from Him by touching His hem from behind and then disappearing in the crowd. Jairus seemed inclined to "shake Him off," when informed about the girl's death. And yet, both received more than they desired; she the gift of per-

fect faith, he not only the health, but the life of his child.

*Applications.* 1) How unselfish is Christ! Petitioners like Jairus disgust us. Moreover, after working miracles for two years, Christ for him was only a mere man endowed with some extraordinary powers. He thought that the Savior had to come to his house and lay His hand upon the patient, though he could hardly be ignorant of what the Lord had done in the case of the centurion's servant in the same city. What a powerful encouragement is all this for confidence in Christ's kindness and what an exhortation to practice similar virtue.

2) Only suffering could bring these two persons to Christ. It will be well when we have to bear a trial, above all one of long duration, to inquire whether the Lord has sent it because He has to tell us or demand of us something for which so far we had no ear. Perhaps the trouble will cease when we draw closer to Him or do what He wants of us.

II. NO MIRACLE TOO GREAT FOR CHRIST. The fact that Jairus, partly in hope and partly in despair, took the distasteful step of going to Christ and even falling at His feet, is a sure proof that his child was near death. The Greek words quoted by St. Matthew permit, and the context of the text as well as the parallel texts in the other gospels demand, that we translate the passage thus: "My daughter is about dead" or "is just as good as dead." Christ not only claimed that He could cure her even at that stage, but encouraged the father not

to give up hope when the news of her death reached him. He told "the minstrels and the multitude making a rout," to go away, because it was as easy for Him to restore the girl to life as it was for them to wake a sleeper. In other words He claimed the power of resurrecting her. He proved this claim by the miracle.

In the case of the sick woman He showed not only that no disease could baffle Him, but that it needed even less than a motion of His hand or a word from His mouth to effect a cure; that mere contact with His garment and a silent act of His will were sufficient.

*Application.* With what confidence must we approach our Savior in all our needs. He makes the degree of our confidence the measure for His help. He tells the woman: "Thy faith hath made thee whole;" and He exhorts the ruler, discouraged by the news of his child's death, "Fear not; believe only, and she shall be safe" (Luke 8,50). But our confidence must concern not only help in temporal distress, but above all aid in spiritual needs.

III. THE SAVIOR'S PEDAGOGY. Our Lord was not satisfied with drawing the ruler and the sick woman to Himself by means of their troubles, nor with helping them in their distress. He improved the opportunity for curing them from the fault which had kept them away from Him too long.

The woman suffered from unreasonable bashfulness. She dared only to approach Him in the midst of a crowd and came up from behind. She said nothing, but merely tried to touch the hem of His garment and

disappear unnoticed among the multitude. But, as St. Mark narrates, Christ asked who touched His garments, and when the disciples replied that the crowd was thronging Him, He looked at the woman. The latter "fearing and trembling fell at his knees," confessed what she had done and with what success. Whereupon Jesus said to her: "Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole: go in peace, and be thou whole of thy disease."

The ruler suffered from human respect and want of faith. Therefore, he was forced to address Christ in the presence of a large crowd and to urge Him to come immediately, lest his daughter die (Mark 5,23). A jostling multitude (Mark 5,24) accompanied them both to the house. This made the action of Jairus as public as possible and forced him to overcome human respect. The delay caused by the sick woman compelled him to stay longer with Christ. Her miraculous cure strengthened his faith. Next, messengers announced the death of the girl and tried to make him give up. But Christ kindly told him: "Fear not; only believe" (Mark 5,36). Then He raised the child from the dead, and the news of this miracle spread in all directions. That man had opportunities enough to give up his reserve towards Christ and to overcome human respect. The Savior can be a strict master; but His strictness is inspired by love and a desire for our salvation.

*Applications.* 1) We must simply square ourselves with the fact that Christ does not cover up our weaknesses,

but lays them bare, and does not rest until we are cured from them. This is often rather disagreeable for the natural man; but without it we should remain helpless babes and miserable cripples in spiritual life. Let us thank Him and not be whining children when He shows Himself as the physician that has to use the knife and the lancet. He has to cut out those moral carbuncles.

2) We must belong to Him entirely and openly. Therefore, He does not tolerate our being ashamed of Him in the presence of others. He, moreover, binds us to Himself with gentle force. He exploits, so to speak, our need in order to compel us to stay and converse with Him, and openly to profess ourselves His followers. This is a greater benefit than being relieved of urgent temporal needs, even if the latter would be granted by means of splendid miracles.

IV. "AND THE FAME THEREOF WENT ABROAD INTO ALL THAT COUNTRY." These two miracles furnish a telling illustration how Christ, as a rule, arranged conditions and circumstances in order to have a sufficient number of witnesses to attest His miracles. For twelve years the woman had suffered from a disease which baffled all treatment. The death of the maiden was so certain that the lamentations customary among the Jews were already being performed. A crowd so large that it impeded Christ's progress was present. And, finally, Jesus expressly attributed the wonderful result to faith in Him. All this was necessary to attain the purpose of His miracles.

But how meagre the results! All the Evangelist can

record is that the miracles were noised about in the whole country; only on a few occasions do we hear that people believed in Christ. In Israel Jesus was a sad failure—through no fault of His, but on account of the prejudices of the people and their blind allegiance to worldly-minded leaders.

*Applications.* 1) This sad example again admonishes us to seek and follow Jesus with an open mind, always ready to be taught by Him and to follow His guidance.

2) It must console us when we meet with failures in our work, and encourage us not to give up when we do not have the success we desire.

COLLOQUY. Acts of faith, confidence, gratitude, above all gratitude for the trials and needs which have brought us to Christ; of petition that the Savior draw us to Him, even at the expense of our sensitiveness, and, if need be, through exterior troubles. "Draw me; we will run after thee to the odor of thy ointments." (Cant. 1,3).

## Meditation 32

### DISAPPEARING LIGHT

(Matt. 9,27–34)

"And as Jesus passed from thence, there followed him two blind men, crying out and saying, Have mercy on us, O Son of David. And when he was come to the house, the blind men came to him. And Jesus saith to them, Do you believe, that I can do this unto you? They say to him, Yea, Lord. Then he touched their eyes, saying, According to your faith, be it done unto you. And their eyes were opened, and Jesus strictly charged them, saying, See that no man know this. But they going out, spread his fame abroad in all that country. And when they were gone out, behold they brought to him a dumb man, possessed with a devil. And after the devil was cast out, the dumb man spoke, and the multitude wondered, saying, Never was the like seen in Israel. But the Pharisees said: By the prince of devils he casteth out devils."

The varied miracles which our Lord at this time was working in great numbers, vaguely suggested at least to some that He might be "The Son of David," which was but another name for the Messias. The fact that the two blind men gave Him this title, proves it, even

though they perhaps used it only to flatter Him. Another sign of progress was the fact that people began to compare His miracles with those of the prophets and declared that they surpassed anything known in the history of Israel. But now the Pharisees gave out that Christ worked His miracles with the aid of Beelzebub. This blasphemous calumny destroyed all the results so far attained, and forever ruined Christ's influence with the people. The sequel showed it.

Let us pray that the infinite patience with which Christ waits for the fruits of His inspirations and graces in us, may not be rendered fruitless by our weakly stopping after the first step or yielding to the influence of frivolous or malicious persons.

I. ISRAEL BEGINS TO UNDERSTAND CHRIST. "And as Jesus passed from thence, there followed him two blind men crying out and saying, Have mercy on us, O Son of David. And when he was come to the house, the blind men came to him. And Jesus saith to them, Do you believe, that I can do this unto you? They say to him, Yea, Lord. Then he touched their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it done to you. And their eyes were opened." It took a long time until Israel began to accept the miraculous cures wrought by Christ with exclamations of gladness; but, satisfied with temporal benefits, they did not think further, even though their prophets had spoken clearly enough about the glory of the Kingdom of God under "The Son of David," a

title often used for the Messias. Never were the Messianic expectations of the Jews as vivid as then. Scarcely did the Baptist appear when he was suspected of being the Messias. But he pointed clearly to Jesus, and the Lord Himself never left a doubt that He was to be the founder of the Kingdom of God and proved the truth of His claim by numerous miracles.

Now at last the two blind men said it openly: "He is the promised Son of David, the Messias of Israel." But it must strike the careful reader of this narrative that the Lord, before curing them, demanded a profession of faith, not in His Messianic dignity, but merely in His power to do what they desired of Him. It almost looks as though He wanted to correct an officious lie or low flattery. However, from the title with which they honored Him, it seems that at least some of the common people began to reflect and draw correct conclusions. This is confirmed by the fact that, after the cure of the dumb demoniac, the people said that never before had a man appeared who performed miracles like those of the Savior.

*Application.* What heavenly patience and how many miracles did it require until this first beginning of success was reached! But how soon are the work and the trouble too much for us, when an erring soul is to be won for Christ or men are to be lifted out of the earthly aims which absorb them and to be inspired with higher ideals. Impatience is always a proof of selfishness. "Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart like unto Thine."

II. THE DEFECTS IN ISRAEL'S KNOWLEGDE. A. THE ACTION OF THE BLIND MEN. "Jesus strictly charged them, saying, See that no man know this. But they going out, spread his fame abroad in all that country." Though our Savior spared no effort to have Israel acknowledge His authority, He did not declare in express terms that He was the promised Messias. For what almost all Jews understood by this title, was not what Christ should be and wanted to be. The only supernatural element left in their idea of the Messias and His Kingdom was the miracle, which would shower unheard-of temporal blessings on Israel here below and humiliate its political enemies. Consequently, Jesus had to speak more of the Kingdom of God than of the Messias.

The present scene is a good illustration in point. What did the blind men ask of Him after saluting Him as the Son of David? Only the restoration of their eye-sight. And why did the Lord, as the Greek text says, "threaten them in anger: See that no man know of this"? He certainly did not mean to enjoin something impossible; yet it was absolutely impossible for them to keep their cure secret. Many would ply them with questions, all the more insistently the more they tried to escape an answer; they had to give some answer. The only acceptable explanation is that He forbade them to tell the people that they had called Him "Son of David." But they ignored the prohibition and "spread *his* fame [not merely that of the miracle He had wrought] abroad in the whole country," in other

words they spoke of Him as the Messias-King in the sense of the Jews.

*Applications.* 1) It is difficult for man to value and treat religious things without adding earthly considerations. Therefore, meditation and reflection must always bring back to our mind the true inner value of external and material things and the object for which God has given them to men.

2) For Christ and His Church everything external and material must remain a mere means for attaining a higher end in the next world. It is indeed self-understood that the right religious and moral order exercises an elevating and ennobling influence on man's nature and the condition of human society. But neither Christ nor His Church have a cultural mission, but theirs is an apostolate of morality and religion. This we must never forget. We can and ought to, co-operate with civic and non-Catholic societies in endeavors of a charitable, social, educational character, but only to a certain extent. What for us is a mere means, for them is the ultimate end; many of our principles are not theirs and many of their principles cannot be accepted by us. Would to God that blind co-operation and too close association had not forced upon us restrictions and regulations which would never receive the approval of the Savior!

B. THE CURE OF THE MUTE DEMONIAC. "And when they were gone out, behold they brought to him a dumb man, possessed with a devil. And after the devil was cast out, the dumb man spoke, and the multitude won-

dered, saying: Never was the like seen in Israel." The Lord was now multiplying miracles of the most divergent nature in a supreme effort to lead the Jews away from their false notion of the promised Messias. He crowned the series of His present manifestations with a strictly spiritual miracle. The Israelites were familiar with exorcisms just as with demoniacal possessions. But their exorcists, like those of the Church, had to use ceremonies which made it clear that they acted only in the name of God and in virtue of a power which was lent to them from on high. Christ, on the contrary, cast the demons out in a manner which showed that He did so by His own power. Without imposition of hands, He merely commanded the evil spirits and they yielded instantly, though unwillingly.

By the miracles of this kind the Lord evidently wanted to impress the witnesses with the true nature of His Kingdom, which is the direct contrary of the kingdom of the prince of this world and secures for its members not freedom from the oppression of political tyrants, but from the slavery of the enemy of their souls. The multitude said with full justice and truth: "Never was the like seen in Israel." That conclusion was correct, but it did not go far enough. The people stopped at barren admiration, which at first sight may seem very complimentary to the Lord, but in reality gave Him just as little honor as when one would praise the author of a great literary work only for the fine penmanship displayed in the manuscript. The people went only half-way also in the result of their

comparison of Our Lord's miracles with those of the prophets; they stopped at the conclusion that nobody ever did what Christ was doing. But what followed from this fact according to the prophecies, which gave this as a distinguishing mark of the Messias?

*Application.* Only a few are serious and courageous enough to draw the last conclusion from the truths of religion. As far as the conclusions which refer to inordinate passions come in question, one must not be guided in reasoning by an excited imagination nor duped by the deceits of the enemy of human nature, who tries to discourage persons of good will by his specious sophisms. If we arrive at deductions which cause worry or seem strange and exaggerated, we ought to propose them to our spiritual director and stand by his verdict. Let us reason soberly and try to settle our doubts.

Wilfully to turn our mind away from considerations which threaten to disturb our comfort, produces a dangerous disposition. For we feel our lack of generosity towards God and begin to shun Him. Often experience will show that the fear of arriving at an unwelcome conclusion was unfounded.

But we must also have the courage to face and to accept conclusions which are of an encouraging nature. If, for instance, we have confessed our sins, the only reasonable conclusion is that they are forgiven and that consequently all fear concerning them is vain. The conclusion from the promise of Our Lord concerning those who receive Holy Communion frequently, amounts to this that they will go to Heaven; why then live in constant dread of being lost?

III. THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST KILLED. "But the Pharisees said, By the prince of devils he casteth out devils." Alas, when the truth at last began to dawn on the Jews, the knowledge was nipped in the bud by the horrible assertion of the Pharisees that Jesus drove out the devils by leaguing Himself with the prince of demons.

In itself their assertion was simply monstrous. They really could not believe it themselves. But they hurled it as a slogan among the masses without proving it. All a crowd wants is a slogan and against even an unreasonable slogan all contrary proofs are of no avail. A slogan now killed the grace of God which just began to take root in their souls, and destroyed all the effects of Christ's subsequent miracles.

*Application.* Here is a lesson showing how preconceived notions, unfounded fears of losing one's influence and being supplanted by another, can blind one's mind. We also see to what lengths a man can be driven by fanaticism and narrowness of mind and heart. But how terrible is the responsibility of one who dares to make assertions dictated by passion, above all if his position and authority lend weight to what he says. Let us be slow and cautious when we are excited. When we feel irresistibly urged to make a remark, it is well to wait for a more quiet moment. This applies to the confessional, the pulpit, the schoolroom, the superior's office, to public speeches and private conversations. That irresistible urge, that restlessness, is always suspicious; it never comes from God.

COLLOQUY. Acts of atonement for the blasphemy of the Pharisees and for the want of understanding manifested by Israel; of petition for docility in fostering the tender germs of Christ's inspirations which He bestows upon us and others. "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth" (1 Kings 3, 10).

## Meditation 33

### CHRIST THE TEACHER AND WONDER-WORKER

(Matt. 9,35)

"And Jesus went about all the cities and towns, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease, and every infirmity."

The Evangelist has described how Christ announced and confirmed the good tidings to Israel and now once more reviews it in a short summary.

All the miracles Jesus worked, were for Him a means to instruct the Israelitic people. But they are salutary also for us. As then, so now, they furnish the first and most important proof of His divine mission and of the truth of His doctrine. However, it assuredly is no mere chance that our Lord worked precisely such miracles as conferred benefits and blessings on men. For He did not intend merely to convince the intellect, but also to win the heart. And finally, He gave a most instructive example to all who are called to do apostolic work.

Let us ask for the grace that we may be convinced by Christ's proofs and won by His kindness, and that

we may learn from Him how to present His doctrine to men and promote God's Kingdom on earth.

I. THE PROOF OF THE MIRACLES. The ideas and truths which Christ preached were entirely new. In their sublimity they sounded strange even to the people of Israel, in spite of centuries of preparation. Nay more, He placed His doctrine above the law of Sinai. Who gave Him the power to say: "But I say to you"?

The prophets had their credentials partly in the fulfilment of their prophecies, partly in the miracles they worked. Christ was a mere man in outward appearance and, therefore, the people to whom He spoke were in duty bound to require divine credentials, when He asked them to accept His doctrine and to live according to His new code of morality.

Jesus by His numerous miracles gave credentials that nobody can doubt even at this distant day. Nobody can doubt about the reality of His miracles. Practically every Jew then living in Galilee was a witness to them; Jesus always took care that their miraculous nature was evident, and at times had them officially attested to by the authorities in Israel, His worst enemies.

The preternatural character of these deeds is beyond doubt. Every kind of illness and ailment yielded to His word and mere will. His word and will worked even at a distance. His cures were instantaneous and, therefore, at least preternatural in the manner in which they were effected. A miracle like the resurrection of the daughter of Jairus was not only a work of divine om-

nipotence, but an act which belongs only to God as the Lord of the living and the dead; it was, therefore, preternatural in substance. And even when He cured diseases for which modern medicine has found remedies, the natural cure takes time and demands the applications of remedies, whereas Christ used no remedy and cured instantaneously. Moreover, He showed Himself in His miracles as the Lord who had perfect control over all nature and all creatures. Even the demons and the raging sea instantly obeyed Him.

Sometimes He worked the miracles with a direct and open appeal to them as proofs of His divinity. Again, He had such an absolute, constant, and perfect control of this power and grouped miracles of such diverse kind together, that His whole appearance, His doctrine, His commands and laws received the seal of divine approval, nay, directly proved His divinity. It is evident, therefore, that both by word and deed He claimed to be God. If that claim was not true, the infinitely holy and truthful God worked these miracles under such conditions that all men were compelled to believe in the worst and most baneful falsehood. Thus God would have practiced the worst deception possible and He would continue this deception by that constant miracle which He works in the preservation of the Church, which is based on faith in Christ's divinity and makes this doctrine the basis of her belief and her demands.

We have considered only the miracles reported by St. Matthew. How absolutely wrong, therefore, is the

claim of the modern rationalists that only the gospel of St. John exhibits Christ as God.

*Application.* The fact that our religion is an eminently rational system and that it answers all human needs, can not serve as basis for the proof that it is revealed by God. Such considerations may recommend it to man and make it acceptable to him; but they cannot be the reason for our faith. Miracles and prophecies, the direct interference of God in the course of nature and history, are the proofs which God and Christ have given us. They have to be explained in sermons and religious instructions. It is necessary also to consider these proofs in our own meditations. In the face of the shallow rationalism preached in modern literature, we have to remain thoroughly imbued with the grounds of our faith; otherwise it is no "reasonable service." (Rom. 12,1–3).

II. THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST'S MIRACLES. Man has not only an intellect, but also a will and a heart. The intellect is to guide both; but it is not independent of the will and heart. Therefore, Christ chose as proofs for His doctrine precisely such miracles as would not only be a solid and incontestable argument for His authority, but win men's hearts for His cause. Doctrines which cut so deeply into human life as those proclaimed by Christ, never will become living convictions unless the human heart is won over to them or at least to the personality of the teacher. Love for the teacher can at least reconcile people with His hard doctrines.

It is precisely the man rendered pliable by need and

suffering who is accessible to help and love; and once gained by love, he is accessible for serious instruction. Every kind of need and suffering was relieved by the Savior. He, moreover, never asked whether the patient deserved the benefit. Frequently, He first had to win the heart by means of the miracle. Once people were convinced of His kindness and benevolence, they listened more willingly to His serious admonitions and demands.

With the sole exception of the Transfiguration and the curse of the barren fig tree, His miracles were all wrought for the relief of suffering humanity. While signs in the heavens and on earth might have been more striking, they would not so well have illustrated the purpose and the character of His mission. All the cures and the resurrections symbolized the great cure from sin and its consequences, which is Christ's great work and the purpose for which He came into this world.

*Applications.* 1) In our apostolic work we must not omit proper instruction or the enlightenment of the understanding of our hearers. But the secret of success lies more in a heart warm with Christian charity than in the clearness and superior force of mind manifested by our teaching. We must win over people before we can successfully instruct, warn, and correct them according to the demands of our office. This is above all necessary for the priest. His contact must be a personal one. He must lend personal help in need and trouble. A priest who sees his people only in the pulpit, will not touch their hearts

and fail when his office obliges him to make demands which are hard to nature.

2) As Christ's mission, so that of the apostle, is first of all a mission to save souls—sinners by effecting their conversion, the just by keeping them on the right road and helping them to become better. Every priest and apostle is, to employ a colloquial expression, first of all a "trouble-clerk." A trouble-clerk cannot limit himself to regular office-hours, because troubles show a decided preference to come when they are least expected. Let us ever remain convinced that our vocation requires us to help others, to be patient and obliging even at unseasonable hours, not only when it suits us.

III. TRAITS OF CHARACTER. To the main title "The Proof by Power" which commentators give to the contents of the second part of this volume, we might fitly add another: "Pastoral Virtues of Christ." For we find many illustrations of them in the circumstances accompanying His miracles. First and foremost among them is His humble kindness, as evidenced in the manner in which He treats Jairus and the sick woman, bears the insulting accusations of being in league with the prince of devils, is not discouraged by the meagre results of His ministry, is not piqued by the request of the Gerasens and the mocking laughter of the minstrels in Jairus' house, respects the authority of the Jewish priests in the case of the lepers, and attends Matthew's banquet.

Secondly, we notice His thoughtfulness, which manifests itself in healing the numerous sufferers assembled

before Peter's house by individual imposition of hands, praising the centurion's faith but not entering his house, choosing for the benefit of His apostles the miracle of stilling the storm and showing Himself imperturbable amidst the roar of the elements.

Thirdly, we see His firmness in refusing the demand of the wavering disciple. Undue attachment to flesh and blood is the ruin of an apostolic vocation. Firmness and honesty mark the answer to the Scribe volunteering to become His companion. Firmness and broad-mindedness characterize His answer to the suggestion of the disciples of the Baptist concerning the fast. He shows Himself independent and immovable, when He declares Himself to the hypocritical Pharisees as the physician of sinners and denies His ministrations to conceited and merely imagined holiness.

*Applications.* 1) We serve a good master. Let us trust Him and devote ourselves entirely to His service.

2) Let us imitate His apostolic virtues.

COLLOQUY. Acts of gratitude for the numerous benefits considered in this meditation, for all the light and all the confidence it is apt to give; of sorrow for want of confidence or generosity manifested by us; of oblation for His service; of petition for the grace of being faithful co-workers of Christ and helpers in need for human souls. "Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou shalt go" (Matt. 8,19).

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AUTHOR

The Savior as St. Matthew Saw Him

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